

AN EXPRESSION OF GUYANITÉ: THE WRITINGS OF SERGE PATIENT AND ELIE  
STÉPHENSON IN THE (RE-) CREATION OF A NATIONAL LITERARY ALLEGORY

BY

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## Abstract

In an academic sense, the history and literature of French Guiana remains largely obscure, overlooked, and unexplored. In the study that follows, an exploration of the history, demographics, and literary production, and the legacies of colonial discourse as they pertain specifically to the French département are presented. The objective of the study is to present and evaluate the effectiveness of postcolonial reactions to legacies handed down from the “official” colonial record, and from one text, Frédéric Bouyer's *La Guyane française: Notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863*, in particular. Following an introduction and analysis of Bouyer's travel chronicle as a prototypical representation of colonial discourse, subsequent explorations of Serge Patient's novella, *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, and Elie Stéphenson's plays, *La Nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* and *Massak*, are investigated as voices of resistance and as a means of rehabilitation of the history and the culture of French Guiana. With the historical D'Chimbo Affair as the focal point of the four primary texts studied, the extent to which the texts of Patient and Stéphenson participate in the formation of a “national literature” or as a part of a “national literary allegory” is examined. With the limitations and particularities that such definitions encompass duly noted, it is concluded that the texts of Patient and Stéphenson do indeed participate in both the formation of a national literature as well as in the making of a national literary allegory.

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## Introduction

“Once you label me, you negate me.” This statement, often attributed to Kierkegaard, is quoted in a somewhat dated, yet still very relevant article in the field of applied behavioral science<sup>1</sup> that advances this notion, stating essentially that “labeling is disabling” and tends to “deny the person uniqueness.” At this point in human history, it should be clear that disparagingly labeling individuals based upon preconceived cultural, social, and historical notions, whether on a personal level, or as part of a larger social, cultural, racial, or ethnic collectivity, constitutes unacceptable and, more often than not, reprehensible means of expression. Although perhaps not as socially accepted a behavior as it once was in the past, we, as a species, continue to struggle with it on a daily basis, to which many television news reports, daily newspapers, and countless other examples will certainly attest. Certainly, a corollary can be easily drawn between the idea of “labeling” a particular human being and stereotyping a collective group of individuals. Indeed, one could argue that highlighting and de-codifying this particular, unsavory, aspect of human behavior represents a cornerstone of the anti-colonial writings of Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon. In *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, citing Sander L. Gilman’s 1985 book entitled *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*, Ania Loomba offers an astute synopsis of the phenomenon of cultural stereotyping as it pertains to the study of colonial discourse: “Stereotyping involves a reduction of images and ideas to a simple and manageable form; rather than simple ignorance or lack of ‘real’ knowledge, it is a method of processing information. The function of stereotypes is to perpetuate an artificial sense of difference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ [Gilman 1985b: 18] (Loomba, pp. 59-60).” From

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<sup>1</sup> Vriend, J., & Dwyer, W. W. (n.d.). “Creatively Labeling Behavior in Individual and Group Counseling.” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 2(1), 31-36.

this account, we witness the disparaging effects of labeling, or stereotyping, as they relate to the master/slave, or colonizer/colonized dialectic, which works to maintain the cultural, social, and economic chasm between the two, and hence lends credence to the phrase “once you label me, you negate me.”

As with many societies and cultures haunted by the colonial legacy, the idea of labeling and stereotyping has weighed heavily upon the colonized peoples of French Guiana, not only in the past, but also through to the present day. Indeed, the geographical space of French Guiana has itself long been a target of “labeling,” and stereotypes. As we shall see in a bit more detail in the first chapter of the study here presented, the territory of French Guiana has long had to contend with such labels as “the green hell” and *le bagne*, and (not inconsequentially) the geographical totality of the space in question has also frequently seen itself reduced to the simple appellation of *Devil’s Island* (*Île du Diable*). Furthermore, as a locus of French colonial expansion initially populated, on the one hand by indigenous Amerindians, and subsequently by slaves imported from Africa, and by immigrant recruits from the Levant and the Far East, all of whom experienced discrimination and stereotyping in one form or another, French Guiana has worn a variety of labels over the centuries, labels that writers and thinkers from Césaire, Damas, Senghor, Memmi, and Fanon to Glissant, Chamoiseau and Bernabé have addressed in nearly all their works. From a cultural perspective, at the very least, a troubled and violent past, coupled with the importation of disparate, and yet very distinct ethnic groups to a land already inhabited for centuries by several linguistically and ethnically unique communities has created difficulties and obstacles in finding common ground upon which to establish any unifying “national” historical legacies – or what some might term a cohesive “national allegory” with which most of the population can identify. In the absence of such a unifying cultural phenomenon, cultural

legacies appear to remain fairly distinctive within the confines of one ethnic group or another, with few exceptions. Nonetheless, the largest ethnic community currently inhabiting French Guiana – the descendants of African slaves imported during the days of the territory’s past as a (failed) plantation colony – seems to be at the epicenter of the evolution of a legend from the colony’s history around which a cultural allegory has been evolving for the past century and a half. Commonly known as “the D’Chimbo Affair,” the episode in question involves the story of the African immigrant known as D’Chimbo, and his “reign of terror” which menaced the colony in the early 1860s. Although the D’Chimbo saga falls short of representing the totality of ethnic groups that comprise the populace of French Guiana, it has had a significant enough impact on the collective imagination for the French Guianese historian Serge Mam Lam Fouck to make the following claim in the opening remarks of the introduction to his 1997 work entitled *D’Chimbo, du criminel au héros: Une incursion dans l’imaginaire guyanais*:

Le nom de D’Chimbo évoque pour les Guyanais un criminel qui a terrorisé l’Île de Cayenne au siècle dernier. Personnage historique doté de pouvoirs surnaturels par la tradition orale, il est même devenu un héros de la littérature guyanaise. L’histoire de D’Chimbo relève donc du « fait divers » et des modes d’expression de l’imaginaire guyanais, domaines où l’investigation historique est pratiquement absente (p. 7).

In the following study, a detailed examination of this historico-cultural phenomenon is proposed with the intent of exploring the literary implications of the evolution of the D’Chimbo figure from historical outlaw into that of a literary cult hero. In essence, as shall be explored in depth in the second chapter of this study, the title figure of the D’Chimbo Affair has himself, as have countless other colonized personages, been subject to a myriad of stereotyped labels, from the earliest colonial records of the episode in the 1860s. But it is the refutation of these stereotypes



and labels which comprise a key, if not the most important, element in the historical and cultural rehabilitation of D'Chimbo through the narratives of Serge Patient and Elie Stéphenson in their attempts to redefine the historico-cultural legacies of their native land relegated by (French) colonial discourse.

The well-known, even if critically overlooked and underappreciated, French Guianese poet and cofounder of the Négritude movement, Léon-Gontran Damas addresses the notions of labeling and stereotyping in his book-length 1956 poem entitled *Black-Label*. I shall now offer a brief analysis of relevant parts of the first part of *Black-Label* in order to demonstrate French Guianese roots of resistance to or passive acceptance of the kinds of stereotyping to which the country has been historically exposed. Laurence M. Porter, in an article entitled “An Equivocal Negritude: Léon-Gontran Damas’s Lyric Masterpiece, *Black-Label* (1956),” provides us with a thematic summary of *Black-Label*, suggesting that this particular poem of Damas moves away from the fervent resistance to cultural assimilation, instigated and promulgated through colonial discourse, as a specific method of the condemnation of colonialism as expressed in his earlier collection *Pigments*, in favor of a more personalized reflection upon the effects of cultural, social, and racial marginalization and segregation:

As for Damas, his *Pigments*, the first major lyric collection of the Negritude movement, expresses an uncompromising resistance to assimilation, but seems to drift because it does not propose an alternative. Nineteen years later, *Black-Label* no longer focuses exclusively on resistance to assimilation. Instead, by turns, Damas’s lyric self recalls past persecutions of blacks and Native Americans; experiences intense nostalgia for his childhood; rejects assimilation to white culture; exalts Surrealist *amour fou* (intoxicated infatuation); recalls African oral traditions; endures sexual temptation from a white

female phantom (an archetype of the Yoruba love-goddess Eruzulie in her demonic aspect); encounters a female incarnation of the ideal (Elydé = *elle* + *idée*, and *élidee*); experiences a mutual *coup de foudre* with a Brazilian woman who seems both ideal and real; berates the ancestors who failed to resist slavery; exalts the worldwide cultural leadership of black jazz; and calls for revolt in the present (p. 191).

Porter's summary offers a solidly accurate introduction to the general themes to be found within Damas's poem and highlights those aspects which render this particular piece a specific representation of Negritude poetry, all the while drawing attention to additional topics which might engender an interest in studying *Black-Label* as it addresses the issue of (colonial and postcolonial) institutional categorizations. As we shall see, the poem itself serves as a jumping-off point for the examination of the four specific works of literature which shall be introduced in the pages which follow. In this manner, the evocative title of *Black-Label* itself addresses the issue of labels/stereotypes, as Porter here illustrates:

The equivocal, polysemous title *Black-Label* situates the author socially as a victim of prejudice, and simultaneously unites him from the beginning with all persons of color, starting where Césaire's *Cahier* ended. It can be understood as either honorific – “I'm black, and I'm proud,” the primary message of Negritude – or defamatory, an inescapable badge of inferiority imposed by racism. In either case, the title *Black-Label* immediately confronts the white reader forcefully with the ultimate in defamiliarization (p. 192).

Whether the title evokes the idea of racial/cultural/ethnic pride or the white man's attempt to keep him neatly and safely confined within ideological and terminological limits, there is no mistaking that the idea of labels, and by extension, stereotypes, is of central importance to the poem's message. Though these labels and stereotypes are evoked by the poem's title, striking the

reader immediately, they soon morph into the lyric self's (to borrow a term employed by Porter) exploration of the effects of these phenomena as embodied in the realities of cultural assimilation.

In part one of Damas's *Black-Label*, the reader finds the poem's lyric voice engaged in an evening of drinking as evoked in the first stanza, which itself serves as a sort of microcosm of the poem as a whole:

ET BLACK-LABEL

pour ne pas changer

Black-Label à boire

à quoi bon changer (p. 9)

In this initial stanza, which within one page morphs into the nearly *identical* *BLACK-LABEL A BOIRE/pour ne pas changer/Black-Label à boire/pour ne pas changer*, the latter stanza of which appears repetitively throughout Part I of the poem, and less frequently throughout the following three parts, the term Black-Label functions on multiple levels. First, it evokes the idea of Western acculturation on the part of the lyric voice, already presenting the reader with a suggestion as to the pervasive, nearly inescapable influence and dominance of Western culture. Secondly, and perhaps more evidently, the *black* component of the product labeling emphasizes the lyric voice's own cultural and racial affiliation. But, as Porter illustrates,

Damas's allusion to Johnny [sic] Walker Black Label Scotch Whiskey visually concretizes the stigma of racial prejudice: the varieties of this brand, and a distinctive square bottle whose label slants downward at 24 degrees, as if representing bias. More broadly, "Black-Label" is a compound synecdoche: in commercial terms, the label stands

for the product; in terms of social pathology, it stands for prejudice; and in literary terms, it stands for the author, a work, and the topic (p. 192).

To counter the metaphorical assimilation to which the lyric voice's drinking of Johnnie Walker Black Label refers, he drowns his melancholy in the *verses J'AI SAOULÉ MA PEINE/ce soir comme hier/comme tant et tant d'autres soirs passés*, which also serve to emphasize the ubiquitous state of anguish that must be felt and which engenders such self-destructive behavior. Nevertheless, there exists an additional subtext to the lyric voice's drinking of the Johnnie Walker Black Label brand of scotch whiskey. In terms of product quality, Johnnie Walker Black Label is known for its superiority over the less expensive Johnnie Walker Red Label, both commonly supplied in drinking establishments. In this manner, the subtext suggests that black is better, hence calling into question the colonial insistence that anything associated with the color black, race included, is inferior and/or associated with sin. As alluded to above, in the second chapter of the study which follows, this ideological association of black with evil and/or degeneracy is revisited in the analysis of a passage in Frédéric Bouyer's *La Guyane française: Notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863* that underscores the classic colonial discursive equalization of black with anything (and perhaps everything) malignant. It is in response to such ideology that Damas, in the poem cited here, as elsewhere, as well as the French Guianese writers Serge Patient and Elie Stéphenson address their narratives.

The poem soon passes to one of the sources of the lyric voice's anguish, and expresses a certain disgust and/or shame at the acceptance of (colonial) norms and assumptions which go uncontested on the part of the apathetic colonized subjects, and are personified in the repeated "ceux qui," as exemplified in the following lines:

Ceux qui naissent

ceux qui grandissent dans L'Erreur  
ceux qui poussent sur l'erreur  
ceux que meurent comme ils sont nés  
fils de singes  
fils de chiens

Ceux qui se refusent une âme  
ceux qui se méprisent  
ceux qui n'ont pour eux-mêmes et leurs proches  
que honte et lâcheté (p. 15)

In the two stanzas cited above, a few pervasive labels/stereotypes are observed. Perhaps most conspicuously is the biblical evocation of Ham, exemplified by the capitalization of the word *Erreur*, signifying the sin to which, as exploited and exacerbated through colonial discourse and institutions, the black race has been historically associated. Subsequent and similar stanzas which comprise Part I of *Black-Label* provide further examples of self-loathing, assimilation, and the acceptance of conventional colonial labels and stereotypes and ideologies, through the use of a lexical field that includes such items as *Ceux qui se renient*, *Ceux qui se traitent eux-mêmes/de sauvages/sales nègres...*, l'hébétude, l'inconscience, la passivité. Perhaps most significantly the lyric voice rails against *Ceux satisfaits d'eux-mêmes/qui se contentent de peu/se contentent de rien.*" Within such a dense and denigrating lexical field, we find a pronounced distress at the thought of apathy and acceptance and/or assimilation in the face of colonial domination, as indeed one is wont to find throughout Damas's oeuvre as a whole. As exemplified in *Black-Label*, apathy toward colonial subjugation and the lack of active resistance

to the idea of cultural assimilation, as personified by the acceptance of labeling and stereotypes as shown above, were issues that haunted Damas throughout his life. Unfortunately, for his memory and his legacy, little has changed with regard to his native homeland more than 30 years after his death, as French Guiana continues to struggle with both internal and external apathy and lack of interest vis-à-vis the cultural expressions of this cofounder of the Négritude movement and his fellow countrymen. Indeed, evidence of this particular brand of indifference can be found with regard to the academic and critical reception of Damas's *Black-Label* itself. As Porter maintains, "in recent decades, Damas has been increasingly, unjustly neglected. Today, most studies of Negritude omit him or give him only passing mention. His masterpiece, the long poem *Black-Label* (1956), has never been thoroughly analyzed (p. 188)." This lack of interest in even Damas's potentially most important literary work proves representative of a general lack of interest in French Guianese literature and cultural expression as a whole. As we shall see a bit further on, the editors of *Introduction à la littérature guyanaise*, Biringanine Ndagano and Monique Blérald-Ndagano highlight the virtual nonexistence of academic and/or critical attention to French Guianese literature in the opening pages of the introduction to their literary anthology. These circumstances are echoed in the introduction to the study entitled *De la Guyane à la diaspora africaine* by authors Florence Martin and Isabelle Favre, whose argument, perhaps even more succinctly than does that of the Ndaganos, explains the external lack of academic interest within French/Francophone cultural studies in North American and French institutions of higher education: "Les universitaires d'Amérique du Nord qui travaillent sur la « francophonie » (comme champ d'étude de la production culturelle – et donc littéraire – hors des frontières hexagonales ou, si elle est interne à l'Hexagone, émanant d'une population immigrée), observent le silence face à la littérature et à la culture guyanaïses (p. 10)."

Thus, as shall become clearer in the pages which follow, the current study will endeavor to address a few of these issues regarding the lack of academic interest in French Guianese literature in its analysis of four literary works featuring the land and peoples of French Guiana living in the shadows of its colonial past and its current “postcolonial” present, with the aim of beginning to fill the void pointed out by the Ndaganos as well as by Martin and Favre. In this manner, it is hoped that the current study may serve as a future starting point for further academic and cultural studies with French Guiana, its peoples, and its cultural expression as the central focal point. By introducing and exploring, first the effects, and secondly, the relative denigrating legacies of colonial discourse handed down by Frédéric Bouyer’s depiction of French Guiana through a lens of a classically imperialist ideological text, we may begin to deconstruct the paradoxes and weaknesses of colonial discourse which neutralize the arguments for the justification of colonial expansionism as pointed out by Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and many others. And by introducing and examining the D’Chimbo narratives of Serge Patient and Elie Stéphenson as textual responses to Bouyer’s literary legacy, I shall explore the extent to which these narratives present an alternative view of one particular episode of French Guiana’s history which has had and/or continues to have, an impact on that which we may term the “collective imagination” of the peoples of the département.

The first chapter of the text to follow consists of a contextualized presentation of French Guiana. Also presented are introductions to the central figure of all four texts under study, the aforementioned historical D’Chimbo character, the crimes of which he was accused, and for which he was tried and guillotined.

Chapter 1 begins with a brief summary of the history of French Guiana with the aim of pointing to some of the issues and topics which will later be explored, and which require at least

a nominal familiarization with the historiography of French Guiana, particularly with regard to its function as a colonial outpost of the French Métropole. Closely related to the contextual presentation of the history of French Guiana is a condensed overview of the country's demographics and the evolution of such throughout human inhabitation of the territory, but with particular attention to population dynamics subsequent to French colonization in the latter half of the 17th century. As shall be demonstrated, the richly diverse and complex structure of French Guiana's population has played a key role in its history and evolution as a political and cultural entity, a circumstance which continues to a significant degree into the present. Such diversity evidently presents a myriad of questions when addressing issues of *guyanité*, a few of which are explored further in the first chapter. As for a firm definition of *guyanité*, this ambiguous topic, as it pertains to cultural, and, more specifically, literary considerations, is summarized briefly in the introduction to the literary anthology entitled *Introduction à la littérature guyanaise*:

Définir cette littérature revient avant tout<sup>2</sup> à s'interroger à la suite de plusieurs autres, et peut-être sans espoir de résoudre l'énigme sur les concepts de « guyanais » et de « guyanité », termes à la mode comme l'ont été en d'autres temps ou le sont encore en d'autres lieux l'africanité, l'antillanité, ou la créolité (p. 10).

By virtue of this citation, we witness some of the nearly ubiquitous terminology employed by the few scholars who have made French Guianese culture, history, and society the focus of their studies. The tone of the citation, such as it is presented, demonstrates a marked frustration in attempting to define French Guianese identity and/or the term *guyanité*. The limitations of such definitions are made manifest when the editors declare that they are “peut-être sans espoir de résoudre l'énigme,” a sentiment reflected in the section's subtitle “Le flou d'une identité et d'une identification.” Further on in the section the Ndaganos, editors of the anthology, briefly wade

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<sup>2</sup> Editors' emphasis



through the different possibilities of defining the terms here presented, but all of which point to indeterminate and ever-evolving conclusions. By way of example, the editors cite Raoul Phillippe Danaho's article, "Regards sur la poésie guyanaise," in which six different levels of French Guianese heritage are delineated and applied to poets either from French Guiana, or with strong familial ties to the département. Absent from this discussion however, is any consideration of the multicultural diversity amongst those poets in question. As this example demonstrates, although a clear and concise definition of *guyanité* is difficult, if not impossible to demarcate, for the purposes of the study here presented, we shall define it, conscious of the limitations of arriving at a universal consensus, as the characteristics resulting from a person's having lived a significant part of his or her life either within the geographical space of French Guiana, or having been exposed the geographical, cultural, social, political, and/or other realities of that geographical space in question, on a familial or other significant level.

Following the contextualized overview of the important historical and demographic aspects necessary to a fuller understanding of the themes, topics, and texts to be explored in the three subsequent chapters, and, as alluded to above, Chapter 1 offers a more detailed introduction to the historical D'Chimbo figure, including biographical components and a presentation of the particulars of the crimes for which, according to the official historical record, he was accused, tried, convicted, and put to death. An effort is made to represent the historical events in question in as factual a manner as possible. However, given the limited availability of resources, and those that do exist being largely, if not always, tainted with emotionally charged political and/or cultural considerations, this too can prove to be a bit problematic. Nevertheless, an understanding of the historical figure of D'Chimbo and of the D'Chimbo Affair is essential as it provides the

primary historical and cultural bases for the texts to be analyzed in subsequent chapters of the study.

Chapter 2 of the study endeavors to highlight labels and stereotypes in a classically colonial context, and the extent to which such discourse produces an ignominious historical and cultural legacy which can and does (negatively) impact colonized peoples on both individual and collective levels. To this end, this second chapter begins with a contextualized introduction to Capitaine Frédéric Bouyer and the “scientific” and “historical” legacy of his travel chronicle, which itself serves as the focus of literary analysis in this particular chapter. As will be demonstrated, Bouyer’s narrative can be viewed as a study in paradox, as much of the text appears inconsistent, self-contradictory, and, more often than not, contingent upon conspicuous subjective commentary, despite claims to the contrary, dedicated to supporting and perpetuating the colonial agenda, which is itself also, at times, sarcastically depicted within the text. Nevertheless, in placing Bouyer’s *Notes* into context, Chapter 2 describes a narrative that one could easily argue exemplifies racially, culturally, and socially elitist, as well as nationalistic, and imperialistic discursive rhetoric and ideology. In this way, the narrative paints the picture of, as viewed from a 21st century postcolonial perspective, a harsh, unrelenting, and very definitely opinionated and militarily-oriented ideologue who epitomizes a number of the most prototypical characteristics of the colonial elite. Indeed, the characterization of this type of individual will be revisited in the subsequent analyses of Patient’s *Le Nègre du gouverneur* and Stéphenson’s *Massak* in the fictional portrayals of the gouverneur Victor Hugues, and it might not come as a complete surprise were it to be revealed that certain aspects of the characterization of the governor were indeed based upon the portrayal of the narrative voice of Bouyer’s *Notes* itself.

Frédéric Bouyer captained a French naval vessel that conducted, one would assume from textual inferences made in his travel chronicle, a fairly routine resupply and/or communications mission to French Guiana in 1862-1863. Bouyer's *La Guyane française: Notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863* is precisely as described by the title – a chronicle of his voyage to the colony, which is divided into two textual parts. The first part, consisting of two chapters, contains a description of the Alecton's voyage from Toulon to Cayenne, by way of the “archipelagos of Africa.” The second part of Bouyer's chronicle, encompassing twelve chapters, describes the “discovery” of French Guiana, various geographical highlights of the country, the French outposts and settlements found within the colony, items of natural scientific interest, the assorted populations living in the colony, and stories and “histories” that have either been told to him or that he has allegedly researched. But it is chapter IV, found in the second part of the chronicle, which is of chief interest to the study here proposed, entitled “*Le brigand D'chimbo, dit le Rongou; ses crimes, son arrestation, sa mort.*” Even the title proves interesting, if not prognostic, with its application of the word “brigand.” In Bouyer's 20-page account of D'Chimbo's experience in French Guiana, “brigand” proves to be one of the mildest terms used to describe the African immigrant. Other terminology used to refer to D'Chimbo or his characteristics includes: *scélérat, farouche émigrant, le terrible Rongou, bête de Gévaudan, bandit, criminel, taureau, monstre, malfaiteur, sauvage, bête fauve, misérable, enfant, animal féroce, fléau, ogre altéré de sang, démon, and égorgeur*. Bouyer scarcely, if ever, refers to his subject as simply a man or a human being, and offers no explanation to his audience as to the motivations, hypothetical or otherwise, behind D'Chimbo's alleged deadly crime spree, choosing instead to concentrate on a litany of extremely deprecating monikers with the combined effect of

propping up the imperialistic assumption of the “natural” and/or moral superiority of the lighter-skinned races.

Bouyer tells us that his description of the “D’Chimbo Affair” is based on the official court records of the trial (p. 116), which, minus the overt racist and imperialistic overtones, an observation that is corroborated by interpretations of the text as expressed by Mam Lam Fouck (*D’Chimbo*, p. 14) as well as by Martin et Favre (p.12), recount the fundamental “facts” of the D’Chimbo Affair as it has been documented in the official colonial record. Mam Lam Fouck’s *D’Chimbo: du criminel au héros*, along with its appendices transcribing relevant sections of the trial, follows essentially the same story line of the events for which D’Chimbo stood on trial as recounted by Bouyer, supporting, at least some of the “factual” events outlined in Bouyer’s chronicle. Ironically, after rather subjectively providing the reader with what he professes to be the necessary background information, Bouyer, lauding his own authorial competence, attempts to convince us of his impartial fidelity to the court record: “Voilà donc le sauvage Rongou installé dans ses repaires, et nous allons voir se dérouler la noire série de ses forfaits. Il me serait facile de faire du roman, je préfère ne pas broder sur ce canevas sanglant et je me borne à être l’écho fidèle de la cour d’assises (p. 121).” Here, we are witness to a prime example of the paradoxes inherent throughout Bouyer’s discourse. The chronicler, through the use of the adjective “sauvage,” is unable to maintain objectivity even within the very sentence in which he makes the claim. The story which Bouyer subsequently relates, while maintaining a modicum of accuracy as per the official court records, is nonetheless fraught with what must surely be an imagined, personalized interpretation of the events in question. Bouyer even allows himself to narrate D’Chimbo’s alleged words (of which the sources are unclear) while reporting on the events surrounding the kidnapping of Julienne, perhaps D’Chimbo’s most remembered victim,

further invalidating his claim to the accurate representation of events. What is most troublesome and should be emphasized, however, in terms of historical “memory,” is that a museum caption found in the appendix of the present study reads like a synopsis of Bouyer’s chapter on D’Chimbo, at certain points even mimicking significant terminology from the frigate captain’s chronicle.

However, as Martin suggests, perhaps most significantly, Bouyer’s *Notes* functions as a written exculpation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century French imperialist policies in its only South American colony (p. 12). The “romanticized” serial novel that Bouyer published a year before his *Notes*, entitled *L’Amour d’un monstre: scènes de la vie créole*, a dull, fictionalized version of the scenes depicted in the *Notes* from which large portions of the text are transposed verbatim, also appears as a text supportive of the French “mission civilatrice” in French Guiana, highlighting the necessity of taming the more “savage” elements of the developing French Guianese society at the time. Bouyer’s *Notes* is of particular importance to our examination of the cultural confrontation of colonial legacy in French Guiana as it is, as alluded to by Martin, the primary written text to which the texts of Patient and Stéphenson are directly responding in their attempts to define their own history and cultural identity. It would seem that if Bouyer’s texts represent a métropolitain definition of French Guianese cultural and social history in a literary context, then the texts of Patient and Stéphenson, to be explored later in Chapters 3 and 4 of this study, represent an opposition to and a redefinition of this Europeanized (re-) presentation of their ancestors and of their nation’s history.

In addition to the presentation and analysis of the textual narrative of Bouyer’s *Notes*, the chapter takes a close look at one particularly revealing sketch, entitled *Le Rongou guettant Julienne*, found within the pages of Chapter 4 of Bouyer’s *Notes*, which serves to graphically

reiterate, illustrate, and accompany many of the prototypically colonial themes and notions to be found in the text. Drawn by Édouard Riou, disciple of the renowned illustrators Charles-François Daubigny and Gustave Doré, and well-noted for his own illustrations of Jules Verne's novels, the sketch, in addition to others found throughout the *Notes*, perhaps explains the connection between Bouyer's encounter at sea with a giant squid (which is narrated in pages 19-22 of the narrative) and its (probable) direct influence on a nearly identically depicted scene in Verne's *20 000 lieues sous la mer*. Riou's participation in the illustration of Bouyer's travel chronicle is perhaps also indicative of an influential circle of friends, colleagues, associates, etc. on the part of the Bouyer which could, in turn, clarify the occasional, though still relatively limited, use of the narrative as a (credible) reference point for historical and scientific articles and books exploring various aspects of French Guiana.

Following the interrogation of Bouyer's interpretation of the D'Chimbo Affair as expressed in his travel chronicle, Chapter 3 offers an analysis of Serge Patient's fictional historical narrative *Le Nègre du gouverneur*. Patient's novella questions not only the historical veracity of the "facts" regarding the D'Chimbo legend as handed down through Bouyer's text, but indeed explores the violence inherent in the (colonial) institution of slavery. By extension, Patient's narrative challenges the veracity of French Guianese history as interpreted by "official," i.e. French métropolitain sources. However, if one could indeed condense into a single term, that aspect of colonial discourse which is addressed perhaps more largely than any one other in Patient's narrative, that term might be *assimilation*.

In terms of pure literary output, French Guianese author Serge Patient (b. 1934) has produced fewer works than his fellow countryman, Elie Stéphenon. To date, according the Ibis Rouge Publishing House's official website, Patient's sole published works are the

aforementioned *Le Nègre du gouverneur* and two short collections of poetry entitled *Guyane pour tout dire* and *le Mal du pays*, which were first published in 1980, also by l'Harmattan, and again in 2001 as an addition to the republication of *Le Nègre du gouverneur*. However, Patient's limited literary output may not be permanent. According to Biringanine Ndagano, who wrote the foreword to the 2001 Ibis Rouge edition of *Le Nègre du Gouverneur*, Patient, who has retired from professional life as a teacher, school administrator, and political figure, has promised to dedicate more time to his writings in the near future (p. 8).

It is, of course, Patient's first published work which is of particular interest to this study. Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, with the provocative subtitle of *Chronique coloniale*, materializes as a direct literary challenge to the French métropolitain interpretation of the history of French Guiana, and to Bouyer's *Notes* in particular. As Bouyer's *Notes* professes itself to be a "factual" chronicle of the Alecton's voyage to the colony, the subtitle of Patient's novella would appear to question the "truths" professed by Bouyer's text.

In *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, some of the more prevalent themes include the examination of violence inherent in colonial discourse, institutions and the slave trade, ambivalence on the part of the colonizer and the colonial subject, the role of mimicry and assimilation on the part of the colonial subject, and the colonizer's fear of miscegenation. The two primary characters of Patient's novella are drawn from the actual colonial experience of the French outpost: the aforementioned D'Chimbo and the enigmatic Victor Hugues, Commissioner to the French West Indies, and later governor of French Guiana from 1799-1809 and again from 1817-1819. In keeping with his challenge of French métropolitain representations of the history of its South American colony, Patient opens his "chronique coloniale" with a citation from Victor Hugues'

dispatch to the French Imperial Minister of the Navy and the Colonies, which is quite revealing (and perhaps emblematic) of the attitudes of French colonial officials towards colonized peoples:

*lorsque, livré à mes réflexions et méditant sur les moyens de conduire cette colonie au degré de prospérité dont elle est susceptible, je considère le peu de ressources que j'ai à attendre des hommes qui habitent la Guyane ; lorsque je vois que les choses les plus faciles à exécuter se présentent hérissées de difficultés et d'obstacles, par l'effet de l'ignorance, de l'apathie et de la mauvaise volonté de la masse ; lorsque je suis si souvent réduit à la nécessité de traiter les habitants en général comme des enfants malades, envers lesquels il faut employer la contrainte pour leur faire prendre un breuvage salubre, je vous avoue, citoyen ministre, que tout courage m'abandonnerait... (Patient, p. 15)*

Such a citation leaves little doubt as to the disposition of the historic Victor Hugues towards his colonial charge, and Patient's depiction of the French colonial governor is reflective of the opinions expressed in Hugues' dispatch to the Colonial Ministry. Such an opening, with the italicized emphasis by Patient duly noted, also prepares the reader for the personality traits that will be encountered in the characterization of the colonial governor. Secondly, the theme of ambivalence confronted throughout the narrative is established by Hugues' juxtaposition of the colony's potential for prosperity against the implied inferiority of the masses. Thirdly, the disdainfully arrogant tone of the governor's dispatch regarding the local population represents characteristic colonial stereotyping by referring to them as "sick children." One is reminded of the words of the imperialist anthropologist, Charles Letourneau, who wrote on the "childlike" characteristics of the black race:



“Le nègre conserve, toute sa vie, nombre de traits moraux qui caractérisent l’enfance (Letourneau, p. 114).”

“Concluons donc que le noir d’Afrique, étudié chez lui, n’a pas encore dépassé les stades inférieurs de l’évolution mentale, et surtout qu’il a conservé dans son caractère, dans son intelligence, dans son impressionnabilité, nombre de traits qui, chez les races plus développés, sont spéciaux à l’enfance (Letourneau, p. 128).”

Thus, the perceptive reader foresees an indication that Patient’s text will effect an inquiry of colonial realities as they existed in French Guiana in the early part of the nineteenth century. Curiously, however, Patient places his D’Chimbo in a time setting which predates the arrival of the historical D’Chimbo. Additionally, Patient’s D’Chimbo is portrayed as a slave, as opposed to the historical figure who has been alternately described as “an immigrant worker (Bouyer, p. 115),” and as a sort of indentured servant (Martin & Favre, p. 20). These two disruptive elements appear to be part of a larger narrative strategy intended to disrupt the accepted, linear colonial history of France in much the same way as other writers and poets from the Caribbean region have done, particularly since Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* was first published in 1939.

In his effort to redefine an episode of French Guiana’s history according to his own terms, Patient mixes “factual” elements with a more “colonized” representation of its history, thus altering or creating a reclamation of imperialistic interpretations such as they existed for more than a century. In so doing, Patient’s text, therefore, appears to question Bouyer’s historical authority, at least as far as the D’Chimbo Affair is concerned.

The fictional story in Patient’s chronicle begins with a scene in which the governor, Hugues, is informed of the fact that D’Chimbo, whom Hugues has appointed as leader of a

regiment of black soldiers charged with chasing down the colony's "maroons," has been seen passionately kissing the white daughter of the colony's public prosecutor, Monsieur Barel. D'Chimbo's shared kiss with Virginie illustrates in almost stereotypical fashion the colonial fear of miscegenation and the violent, heated passions that such an encounter engenders. Another central theme encountered in Patient's novella through the relationship between Virginie and D'Chimbo, as well as the relationship between Lady Stanley, D'Chimbo's previous white English lover, concerns the construction of the colonized subject's identity through his sexuality. In Chapter 3 of the current study, detailed attention to this theme of black/white-master/slave relations, as examined by Fanon, in addition to discussions of the ambivalence of miscegenation as proposed by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, will be explored.

Employing an interesting combination of non-chronological strategies, including the use of flashbacks at essential moments in the text, Patient recounts D'Chimbo's story from the moment he is violently abducted from his home in Africa (witnessing his wife's brutal murder in the process), through his disembarkation in Cayenne, his being sold into slavery, and his subsequent appropriation of the French language and customs of the era. As Frank Kermode suggests in his article, *Secrets and Narrative Sequence*, non-linear sequence in a narrative may serve to contradict the normative "cause and effect" perception of reality within Western thinking (In *On Narrative*, p. 80). Accordingly, one might argue that the non-linear nature of Patient's narrative represents a technique used to alter and thus question the Western interpretation of reality in the colonial experience of French Guiana's past.

Having impressed Victor Hugues with his assimilation of French colonial society, D'Chimbo finds himself appreciated by the governor and the governor's fellow colonial authorities, thereby eventually rising to a military status unheard of for a former slave within the

imperial infrastructure of French Guiana. D'Chimbo's rise in prominence is presumably destroyed (the ultimate consequences of D'Chimbo's impudence are never revealed verbatim by the author) by his relationship with Virginie, perceived by the colonial authorities as completely overstepping his bounds and entirely unacceptable to "civilized" society. Patient's narrative impressively illustrates the ambiguities and ambivalence of the condition in which the story's protagonist finds himself<sup>3</sup>. Patient's D'Chimbo correspondingly appears ensnared in a simultaneous desire to mimic his French colonial masters, enjoying many of the comforts of the dominant class, and repulsion from these same individuals who have so pretentiously and brutally enslaved him and others whom they see as no different from him. His apparent extraordinary assimilation into the French colonial military structure and his skillful appropriation of the French language and continental customs create the illusion of the perfectly assimilated colonial subject. Yet D'Chimbo's internal monologue within the narrative alludes to this assimilation as a possible means of strategic resistance: "Il savait bien ce qu'il voulait. Pénétrer dans la société du maître, y pénétrer sans effraction. La langue était la clef de cette société fermée au seuil de laquelle il était las de croupir (Patient 1978, p. 41)." This citation itself exemplifies the complex relationship between the colonized peoples of French Guiana and their colonial masters. As Patient's narrative was written in the postmodern era, it would seem that, at the symbolic level, the phrase suggests a continued ambivalent relationship existing between colonizer and colonized in present-day French Guiana to which Patient appears to address his rewrite of this particular episode of French Guianese history. This idea is validated in Mam Lam Fouck's *D'Chimbo: du criminel au héros*. Citing a nationalist movement towards political independence in French Guiana during the 1970s and 1980s, Mam Lam Fouck suggests that the

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<sup>3</sup> This is reminiscent of many of the characteristics of the black general Toussaint L'Ouverture as depicted by C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins* who, according to the author, was torn between his revulsion of slavery and his desire that the colony of Saint-Domingue remain French.

appearance of Patient's novella, as well as Stéphenson's plays, reflects a cultural awakening on the part of the inhabitants of French Guiana which sought to distance the colony-turned-département from the historical and cultural legacy left to it by the colonizing power (pp. 66-67). In another of Mam Lam Fouck's works, *Histoire générale de la Guyane française*, the historian presents readers with an idea of the ambivalent relationship between French Guiana and its métropolitain "parent":

Quoique dépendante, elle se révèle rebelle à une identification pure et simple aux sociétés coloniales africaines ou asiatiques. L'intégration à la nation française, avec ses implications socio-économiques (notamment le système de protection sociale, la rémunération des fonctionnaires assurée par l'État et des équipements publics de [sic] pays industrialisés), a miné la dynamique du mouvement nationaliste et marginalisé la revendication du « droit des Guyanais à la souveraineté nationale ». (p. 206)

The timeframe in which Patient's and Stéphenson's texts examining the D'Chimbo character were published will be a question of considerable relevance to Chapters 3 and 4 of the study here presented, as it implicates larger questions of a national identity belonging exclusively to French Guiana. Thus, at once an indictment of colonialism from the perspective of the colonized (in the Memmian sense of the term), and a call to attention regarding the futility and/or impossibility of (complete) cultural assimilation, *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, despite its lack of attention in academic circles, nevertheless functions to begin filling the cultural void as mentioned by the Ndaganos in the introduction to their literary anthology. Chapter 3 of the current study strives to illuminate this point, and explores to what extent this occurs, and to what extent, if any, the narrative serves as an act of cultural *engagement* aimed at a target audience viewed as apathetic and acquiescent.

The fourth and final chapter of my study features a presentation and analysis of the poet/playwright Elie Stéphenson's representation of the D'Chimbo legend through an examination of his dramas, *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* and the aforementioned *Massak*. In many ways, Stéphenson's theatrical pieces mirror Patient's narrative rehabilitation/recuperation of the fictionalized D'Chimbo figure. Both writers' works serve as indictments of colonial norms, realities, discourses, and institutions in the specific experience of colonial/postcolonial French Guiana. Both writers have been described as disciples of Léon-Gontran Damas, who, as demonstrated earlier, proved himself through his writings, to be quite perturbed by social, political, and cultural apathy and disengagement on the part of his fellow racial brethren. While more often than not associated with a pan-African message, this obviously included his racial compatriots in his native Guyane, and this circumstance is emphasized by his treatise "Pour ou contre l'assimilation" found in his ethnological study *Retour en Guyane*. As Damas's literary heirs-apparent, both Patient and Stéphenson share with their literary predecessor the same abhorrence of the political and cultural apathy of their countrymen in the face of past and present colonial discourse and institutions inherent, but not necessarily limited to, the French Guianese experience.

Stéphenson has been characterized by J.-M. Ndagano (Introduction, *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* suivi de *Massak*, p. 11), as well as by Martin and Favre (p. 79), in the most succinct of terms, as an *écrivain engagé*. Stéphenson's biography is a testament to his own commitment, similar to that of Patient, and perhaps even more visibly so, to encourage his compatriots to reclaim their own cultural and historical identity. Favre elucidates this point by telling us that Stéphenson put his musical talents to use in the 1970s and 1980s as part of the community activist troupe known as the "*Nèg' marrons*" who used their rhythms to highlight the

“social, political, and poetic” inclinations of its members (p. 79), a statement which is corroborated by J.-M. Ndagano (p. 12). Significantly, the name of the group represents a form of social, political, and cultural resistance to the realities of French colonial domination, or as Ndagano puts it, “...ce sont ces esclaves qui ont choisi « lavi danbwa » (la vie dans la forêt), des Nègres, inadaptés aux conditions de vie dans *la bitasion* (propriété coloniale) ou sur la plantation, révoltés contre la brutalité des maîtres assoiffés d’une autre forme de liberté, d’égalité, et de fraternité que celle que proposait la France (p. 12).” The musical group used its appearances to draw attention to the realities associated with the condition of slavery in French Guiana’s past as well as the circumstances of being black in a white man’s colony, both past and present. The *Nèg’ marrons’* were noted for their production of a 45 rpm record in honor of Léon-Gontran Damas, who, Ndagano informs us (p. 13), had a heavy influence on Elie Stéphenson, which itself serves as a testament to the socio-culturally engaged agenda of the music group and of Stéphenson’s cultural expression.

Similar to Patient’s literary treatment of the D’Chimbo figure, Stéphenson’s two theatrical pieces proposed for investigation in Chapter 4 demonstrate an emphatic interrogation of assimilation, the dangers of which are perhaps more pronounced and (potentially) deadly than in the Patient narrative. Be that as it may, another aspect of colonial discourse provides the primary element as motivating factors for the characters in *La nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo*: racism.

While Patient’s treatment of the D’Chimbo character/figure appears to the reader in the form of a novella, Stéphenson’s two texts exploring the legend are presented as theatrical works. In this manner, it would appear that Stéphenson’s and Patient’s targeted audiences differ, if only slightly. Whereas Patient’s text appears intended for a reading public, perhaps even a more

“bourgeois” one, it might be argued that Stéphenon’s plays reflect the significant influence of orality in French Guianese cultural expression. This may also imply a strategic move on Stéphenon’s part to reach a wider audience (an audience of the masses, perhaps), and one which might not already be familiar with Patient’s narrative.

Chapter 4 endeavors to demonstrate to what extent racism and colonial discourse play a role in the assimilationist interaction and acceptance of colonial norms and ideology. Conversely, Chapter 4 shall explore, through its study of *La nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo*, to what extent racist ideology and stereotypes influence anti-colonial criminal behavior, and as a consequence, the victimization of one colonial subject at the expense of another.

Chronologically, Stéphenon’s *La nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo* is the second of the major “fictional,” works proposed in this study examining the evolution of the historical and literary/mythological figure of D’Chimbo. Originally published in 1984, *La nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo* was initially written in a mixture of Creole and French, and it was not until its republication in 1996 by Ibis Rouge that Monique Blérald-Ndagano and Aude Thérèse translated a completely standardized French version of the play. In his introductory note to the editor, Stéphenon explains his socio-cultural justification for originally writing the play in Creole, a strategic choice that may be seen as an appeal to a particular audience, and as a means of resistance to the cultural/linguistic hegemony of France in French Guiana’s past and present, or both simultaneously.

The first of Stéphenon’s two theatrical pieces featuring D’Chimbo to be explored in Chapter 4 differs significantly from the aforementioned works by Bouyer and Patient in its depiction of the historical/literary figure in question. As Ndagano and Favre both imply, the D’Chimbo of Stéphenon’s *Nouvelle légende* varies from Bouyer’s and Patient’s interpretations

in that the hero is portrayed as neither Bouyer's antisocial monster nor as Patient's conflicted, colonized servant, but rather as an otherwise intelligent, independent African immigrant gold miner, victimized on several levels by the realities of colonial discourse and its associated institutions and authorities.

*La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* is a fairly short piece divided into 5 acts. Specifically, it operates as a theatrical response to the dialogue attributed to D'Chimbo in Bouyer's *Notes* during the episode in which the aforementioned Julienne is held captive. One might even argue that in this play, Stéphenson proposes an explanation as to the fundamental causality of D'Chimbo's actions, which had never before been offered or perhaps even investigated on a literary, historical, or any other level.

Perhaps as part of a larger narrative strategy by the play's dramatist, only two of the personae are permitted names: the protagonist D'Chimbo, and his principal "love" interest, Eléna, a Creole native of Cayenne who replaces the non-fictional, historical Julienne. The piece opens with D'Chimbo raging for his lack of a woman, and damning his African origins which hinder his ability to easily obtain female companionship in the colonized environment in which he finds himself. The story here presents a leitmotiv which is later highlighted by the refusal of a prostitute to accept D'Chimbo's marriage proposal. Citing the fact that he is "too black," the prostitute's refusal humiliates D'Chimbo to the point that his anguish motivates the kidnapping of Eléna. D'Chimbo's aspirations of marriage to the coveted prostitute, first identified as the 1<sup>ère</sup> Matado, and later as Isabelle, are thwarted by her refusal of the proposal. Perhaps as a sort of an internal defense mechanism, D'Chimbo fails to fully comprehend the dynamics and the reasoning for Isabelle's unspecified refusal. D'Chimbo's stubbornness persists until, in a cruel and mocking manner, Isabelle's friend, the 2<sup>ème</sup> Matado, spells out the realities of the situation to



him. It is the 2<sup>ème</sup> Matado who callously, and with brutal honesty, elucidates the realities of the prejudices of skin color in colonial society. As related directly and indirectly to this scene, implications regarding the pervasive influence of colonial discourse, as they pertain to the point of self-loathing or the denial of one's own blackness, are explored further in Chapter 4.

Like Patient's narrative, *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* is non-linear in its progression, with interspersed scenes serving as flashbacks, which perhaps serves as another example of narrative strategy intended to refute the Manichean/linear structure of Bouyer's *Notes*. The text introduces another important topic in the form of the white foreman's accusation that D'Chimbo has stolen gold from his employers. The accusation is reminiscent of Albert Memmi's portrait of the colonized as a presumed thief, and further underscores D'Chimbo's alienation as a black man (Memmi, p. 90). Indeed, D'Chimbo's guilt (unquestioned by Bouyer) and inadequacy appear as synthetic of such discursive racist theories as were articulated by Gobineau in 1854 in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*.

Without here expounding upon some of the deeper implications of Stéphenon's play, which shall be examined in further detail in the fourth chapter of my study, it is nonetheless fairly apparent that *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* is, among other considerations, a treatise on prevailing structural ideologies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which divided the inhabitants of French Guiana along racial, social, and class-oriented boundaries, one which implicates the effects of colonial discourse upon the social constitution of the colony. More specifically, the play scrutinizes the perceptions of D'Chimbo as a black man living and working in a racist social framework ubiquitously infused with colonial ideology. Stéphenon's D'Chimbo finds himself at odds with all three of the racial groups featured in the piece: the white colonial elite, the mulatto/Créole bourgeoisie, and the black lower classes. It is similar to the sense of alienation

and/or marginalization that one infers from the writings of Mam Lam Fouck and in *Introduction à la littérature guyanaise* as representative of a pervasive identity crisis experienced by a large portion of the French Guianese population.

A more detailed analysis of this dramatic piece in correlation with the other texts previewed in this introduction will, in subsequent chapters, substantiate the hypothesis that, taken together, Patient's and Stéphenson's texts represent a larger, culturally expressive strategy of resistance to and recuperation of the lost and/or repressed cultural and historic past of French Guiana's colonized peoples, and an attempt to define a national identity devoid of imperial intrusion.

Stéphenson's second play featuring the D'Chimbo figure has more in common with the objectives of Patient's textual project than does *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo*. In point of fact, in the introduction to *Massak*, Stéphenson himself expressly cites Patient's colonial chronicle as a source of inspiration for the play (p. 109). Careful not to allow the experience of *Massak* to steer his audience towards a specific, and thus a restricted reading based on his own personalized interpretation of *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, Stéphenson suggests that *Massak*, in conjunction with Patient's text, is part of a more profound localized response to strategic and methodological problems facing French Guiana and its population, in particular, the "colonized" parts of that population (p. 109). In essence, through his own words, Stéphenson envisions this second piece as an extension or a continuation of the ideas and themes proffered by Patient's novella. Thus, he may justify the message of *Massak* as an instrument of the overall defining project of a national literature, which also provides, at least initially, some answers to the questions expressed by the Ndaganos and doubtlessly contemplated by many others: What is French Guianese literature? Does a "French Guianese literature" even exist? If so, of what is it

comprised? Importantly, how would/does it differentiate itself from other nearby literatures, notably (French) Antillean literature, into which it has traditionally been integrated? Additionally, what defines the French Guianese writer? In this fashion, Stéphenon's play appears to call upon the audience to themselves consider some of the issues regarding cultural and political autonomy, as well as the representation and interpretation of the history of French Guiana.

As alluded to by Stéphenon himself, *Massak* picks up the story where *Le Nègre du gouverneur* leaves off (p. 109). The characters of Victor Hugues, Virginie, and Lady Stanley (who, in Stéphenon's play has been re-designated as Lady Moore), and D'Chimbo (whose name is now metamorphosed into Kalimbo) are revisited in Stéphenon's theatrically adapted continuation of Patient's narrative. Many of the themes introduced in Patient's narrative find new expression in *Massak*: those of ambivalence, assimilation, and the colonial fear of miscegenation in particular. *Massak* even goes so far as to borrow scenes, images and words directly from Patient's text. It is doubtlessly for these reasons that the playwright warns readers that *Massak* is not meant to engender a particular reading of *Le Nègre du gouverneur*. Instead, Stéphenon suggests that the goal of his play is to juxtapose two strategic methods of dialectic analysis as regards the questions surrounding French Guianese identity and the recuperation of its past (p. 109).

*Massak* features D'Chimbo/Kalimbo's encounter with the leader of the maroons with whom he has been charged to negotiate surrender by the governor, Victor Hugues. The central conflict pits the maroon leader, Pompée, against D'Chimbo/Kalimbo, both offering, through dialectic exchange, alternative strategies of resistance to the prevailing colonial power. Pompée advocates direct, violent confrontation whereas D'Chimbo/Kalimbo favors "use of the master's

own tools against him.” The central argument therefore, is which method of resistance is preferable, i.e. more effective? In this piece, Stéphenson’s choice in constructing a narrative in French, as opposed to the Creole used originally in *La nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo*, reflects the complexities, ambivalences, and conflicts central to *Massak*’s thesis, and may indeed represent the playwright’s own perplexity on the very question at issue. As such, we gain a certain insight into a few of the problematic cultural and social issues facing the population of French Guiana as they are expressed through Stéphenson’s play.

In comparing *Massak* with *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, the reader becomes aware that Stéphenson’s play slants more towards an incursion into the identity crisis facing D’Chimbo/Kalimbo as he is forced to come to terms with the implications of his appropriation of the French language and customs of the colonizing society. Is his appropriation of French culture, as he maintains, strategically revolutionary? If he is able to penetrate into the colonizer’s society, will he be able to force the colonizer to recognize him as a man? If Pompée tangibly personifies the anti-colonial individual, D’Chimbo/Kalimbo’s status is somewhat more enigmatic, offering, as he states in the play, an alternative to the inevitable loss of life that will result in Pompée’s revolutionary vision (Stéphenson, p. 146). In depicting D’Chimbo/Kalimbo as a reflective individual with humanistic affinities, Stéphenson refutes the racist colonial stereotypes, expressed so imperiously by Bouyer, Gobineau, Letourneau and countless others, of the African as mentally deficient and brutal in nature.

In many ways, Stéphenson’s portrayal of the character, not unlike that of Patient, is reminiscent of the ambivalent attitudes of Toussaint L’Ouverture, Christophe, and other black generals towards the French Republic described by C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins*, which bears witness to the pervasive extent and the essentializing tendencies of the French colonial

system in the era of colonial slavery. As in Patient's text, the portrayal of D'Chimbo/Kalimbo in *Massak* underscores the complex ambiguity of the condition of the colonized individual, the slave in particular, such as it existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century French Guiana, and the sustained indeterminate and ambivalent circumstances relating to the realities of the creolized and/or marginalized (non-métropolitain) inhabitants of present-day French Guiana. One may interpret these texts, therefore, as an attempt at reconciliation with the past. Thus, in its interrogation of and response to an imposed or repressed history, it would appear that, together with *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* and *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, *Massak* answers, at least to some degree, the perceived need to define a "national literature" in French Guiana - one that authenticates the past, present, and future of a national identity, devoid of and resistant to the imperialist discourse which has, until now, presumed to speak on its behalf.

As the subsequent presentation and analysis of Stéphenon's second D'Chimbo-based drama will demonstrate, *Massak* also represents a return to the treatment of the process of cultural assimilation as the principal thematic issue facing the play's protagonist, Kalimbo, a metamorphosis of Patient's D'Chimbo, as the narrative of that drama draws its inspiration from Patient's novella, repeating and enhancing much of the storyline, and subsequently proposing a final outcome as a result of the assimilationist strategy of colonial resistance, left otherwise unresolved in *Le Nègre du gouverneur*. As shall be seen, Stéphenon's *Massak* endeavors to impart a lesson upon those apathetic to and accepting of the process of cultural assimilation, and it is a harsh one indeed.

In addition to introducing and exploring the themes and topics outlined above as they pertain specifically to each of the four texts proposed for study, the specific aim of the current study shall be to determine the extent to which, if at all, Patient's and Stéphenon's D'Chimbo

narratives make a contribution not only to the historical recovery of the peoples of French Guiana (specifically the descendants of African slaves), but also the extent to which the narratives participate in the formation of what can be termed a “national literature,” and additionally, whether or not the two writers’ works can be considered part of a national literary allegory. In the chapter entitled “On National Culture,” found in Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, addressing the “new-found tensions which are present at all stages in the real nature of colonialism...on the cultural plane,” the author states,

In literature, for example, there is relative overproduction. From being a reply on a minor scale to the dominating power, the literature produced by natives becomes differentiated and makes itself into a will to particularism. The intelligentsia, which during the period of repression was essentially a consuming public, now themselves become producers. This literature at first chooses to confine itself to the tragic and poetic style; but later on novels, short stories, and essays are attempted (p. 239).

In the passage cited above, Fanon delineates his interpretation of the beginnings of what he sees as what may be termed a “national literature.” Later on in the paragraph, Fanon argues that as “the objectives and the methods of the struggle for liberation become more precise, (p. 239)” the literature becomes less acerbic, less pessimistic, which, in turn trends more and more toward assimilation and acculturation, thereby rendering homage to the dominating power. In the study to follow, the analysis of the Bouyer travel narrative will demonstrate a classic colonial interpretation of a land and peoples considered, on all levels, inferior to the occupying French colonizers. The mocking and astringent overtones of the Patient and Stéphenson D’Chimbo narratives, varying to differing degrees according to each writer, and yet collectively in response to Bouyer’s text, thus, shall be shown to participate in the second and third stages in the

formation of French Guiana's "national literature," as defined by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (p. 222).

In describing "allegory" in a postcolonial context in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Ashcroft et al. state:

The simplest definition of allegory is a 'symbolic narrative' in which the major features of the movement of the narrative are all held to refer symbolically to some action or situation. Allegory has long been a prominent feature of literary and mythic writing throughout the world, but it becomes particularly significant for post-colonial writers for the way in which it disrupts notions of orthodox history, classical realism and imperial representation in general. Allegory has assumed an important function in imperial discourse, in which paintings and statues have often been created as allegories of imperial power. Consequently, one form of post-colonial response to this has been to appropriate allegory and use it to respond to the allegorical representation of imperial dominance (p. 9).

As one of the stated objectives of the following study, cited earlier, is to explore the D'Chimbo narratives of Patient and Stéphenon as part of a "national literary allegory," I shall also attempt to uncover the extent to which the writings in question endeavor toward the disruption of "notions of orthodox history," as termed by Ashcroft et al. In other words, do the D'Chimbo narratives function as a "counter-discourse" to that espoused by Bouyer's *Notes*, and if so, to what effect? In the investigation of Patient's and Stéphenon's texts as responses to Bouyer's literary legacy, we shall simultaneously attempt to determine the impact or influence of the narratives on the collective psyche, or "collective imagination," of the peoples of French Guiana, and whether or not the narratives serve as an effective "symbolic narrative," to use another of

Ashcroft et al.'s terms, that reflects the cultural realities and identity inherent to human existence in French Guiana. This experiment will be conducted by examining in some detail those textual and thematic elements found in the writings of Patient and Stéphenson, which, one might argue, highlight, resist, and repudiate colonial discourse and realities such as they have existed, and continue to exist in the French département of La Guyane.



## **Chapter 1: French Guiana in Context**

Perched atop the northeastern quadrant of the South American continent sits a trio of geographically and historically linked lands which, in 2012 are known as Guyana, Surinam, and French Guiana. The trio, known collectively and somewhat obscurely as “the Guianas,” occupies the majority of a greater geographical highlands region which stretches roughly from Venezuela’s Orinoco River in the north to Brazil’s Rio Negro in the south. The eventual political configuration of the independent nations of Guyana and Surinam and the French département of La Guyane resulted from centuries of European colonial competition in the region, with the British ultimately taking control of Guyana (formerly British Guiana) from the Dutch in 1814 until that nation's independence in 1966, the Dutch themselves colonizing Surinam (formerly Dutch Guiana) until self-governance was established in 1975, and the French colonization of French Guiana which today France includes as one of its own 100 official départements as well as one of its 26 official régions. Thus, it is clear that political, social, and cultural differences and issues, to list but a few, separate French Guiana from her sovereign neighbors.

Archeological evidence points to the conclusion that the first human habitation in French Guiana dates to at least 5,000 years prior to the arrival of European explorers/colonists (Montabo Vol. I, p. 26). The lack of interest in exhaustively excavating archeological sites as well as the general disinterest in studying aspects of Pre-Columbian human habitation in the territory as described by Montabo establishes itself as indicative of a more generalized academic disinterest in French Guiana, a fact which Biringanine Ndagano and Monique Blérald-Ndagano are keen to

point out in their introduction to the anthological collection, *Introduction à la littérature guyanaise* (p. 16).

In spite of the perceived lack of scholarly interest in French Guiana, a small corpus of descriptive literature does exist, albeit rather superficial and detached. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a significant portion of the books published with the French colony as the main focus centered either upon its function as the motherland's notorious penal colony or upon its unique interest to explorative natural scientists. Established in 1852 by the government of Emperor Napoleon III, *le bagne*, or penal colony, had, by the period between the two world wars, gained a worldwide notorious reputation as a locus of cruel and unusual punishment and suffering. Despite, or perhaps because of its notoriety, French Guiana drew a handful of curious adventurers and other transient figures who related their adventures in a series of sensationalist texts that did little to alleviate the perception of the colony as a veritable "hell on earth," and in so doing, left behind an arguably second-rate, disparate and unflattering 'literary' legacy with which, until recently, native residents have often had to contend.

Juxtaposed against this lackluster, transient literary legacy, there exists a small, but not insignificant assemblage of what might be termed "native" literature. Among the most recognizable, the poets Léon-Gontran Damas and René Maran are well-remembered and respected for their contributions to Francophone literature. Indeed Maran broke literary boundaries by becoming the first black author to win the coveted Prix Goncourt (in 1921), and Damas is almost universally recognized at the very least, as one of the founding members of the Négritude movement. More recently, the works of Bertin Juminer, Micheline Hermine, Serge Patient, Elie Stéphenson, and Alex May, among others, have emerged as important contributions to Francophone and Caribbean literature.

## **From Colony to Département: A Brief Historical Summary**

As one of the primary aims of this study is to explore the recuperation of national culture and past voices in French Guiana, the absence of at least a brief abstract of historical events, such as they have been recorded, would be detrimental to a fuller understanding of the people and places in question. It is therefore incumbent upon us to contextualize certain key components of French Guiana's past before embarking on a project of analysis concerning national culture and its literary expression. The texts at the heart of this study center primarily upon the realities of French colonialism and, owing to this condition, we shall commence our review of relevant historical events from the period in which French interest in the territory in question translated into transatlantic expeditions and competitive land-grabbing to a significant degree.

The colonial attraction of that part of the South American continent, which would eventually become known as French Guiana, began for France at the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and according to historian Serge Mam Lam Fouck, was largely the product of political, economic, and religious motives (*Histoire générale* p. 21). However, as the historian also points out, French interest in the territory came about, in a sense, by default:

...c'était la région la moins contrôlée des vastes empires espagnols et portugais ; ils ne s'y sont intéressés que par moments en fonction des aléas de la colonisation française en Amérique du nord et aux Antilles aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles... (p. 21)

Nonetheless, French exploration of the territory appears to have begun in that part of the territory today known as the Île de Cayenne, the district that would eventually give rise to the city of Cayenne, for centuries the focal point of the colony's administrative activity, and political center of today's département (Mam Lam Fouck, *Histoire générale*, p. 21).

The year 1604 marked the earliest French incursion into the territory with an expedition led by Capitaine Daniel de Larivardière which attempted to establish a permanent settlement on the Oyapock River in the area near present-day Cayenne, but which also ultimately proved unsuccessful. Between the years 1604 and 1652, ten further attempts at colonization by the French failed, and it was not until 1657 that anything resembling a permanent European presence was established when the Dutch installed four settlements, one near Cayenne, a second at Rémire, a third at Matoury, and a fourth along the Approuague River (Mam Lam Fouck, p. 23). After years of nearly continual British, Dutch, and French competition in the region, a French expedition in December of 1676 led by the Comte d'Estrées finally chased the Dutch from the territory that eventually became French Guiana. As Mam Lam Fouck tells us, “le contrôle de la France sur l'espace conquis ne sera plus remis en question après l'intervention armée du comte d'Estrées (p. 23).”

Yet even after successfully chasing their rivals from the region, the first French attempts at installing permanent settlements in the land that they now claimed as their own proved to be much less than productive. In 1763, an aggressive project of colonization was attempted at Kourou, when 10,000 would-be settlers disembarked. Within a year, 60% of the new arrivals had perished due to disease and the inability to adjust to the new climate. Seeking refuge, most of the survivors headed for three small islands several miles from the coast. At the time, the island group was known as the Îles du Diable, so called because of the treacherous ocean currents that lashed unrelentingly at the islands. But due to the “salvation” which these islands afforded the refugees, the islands were then renamed the Îles du Salut, a name which persists to this day.

In spite of the numerous early failed attempts at colonizing the territory, French colonial settlement and exploitation indeed precariously took hold, and French Guiana became a plantation colony similar to its Caribbean Island neighbors to the north. Although it is probable that the first African slaves introduced to the territory were brought over by Dutch colonists, it is clear that the French also profited from the use of slave labor as a means toward its own colonial ambitions. In 1673, Louis XIV permitted the creation of the Company of Senegal to transport African slaves to France's American colonies in the Antilles and in Guiana, which provided the principal source of manual labor until final emancipation in 1848.

In the years between 1685, when Ministre Colbert instituted the *Code Noir*, and 1794, which saw a first attempt at slavery abolition in the French Republic, attempts were made to transform the harsh geography and climate of French Guiana into an agriculturally productive outpost. The years between 1817 and 1848 saw the land at its most profitable, no doubt due mostly to the toil of the 13,000 slaves who populated the colony, and who constituted 68% of the total population. In 1848, after the abolition of slavery in all French territories, the colony suddenly found itself with a critical shortage of manpower. Two principal solutions were proposed to meet the need for manual labor in the floundering outpost, one being the forced labor of convicts, and another being a call for African and Indian immigration under contract. Yet, as Mam Lam Fouck, in *Histoire générale de la Guyane française* explains, "Les colons répugnaient en effet à y employer des bagnards libérés," and the call for immigration was met with little enthusiasm by potential laborers, who opted instead to head for the more climactically hospitable islands in the Caribbean (pp. 61-62). Having thus failed to attract the necessary manpower, the colony turned toward a more insidious form of labor importation. In another of Mam Lam Fouck's works, *D'Chimbo: du criminel au héros*, the historian explains an alternative

practice used by French colonizers known as “reparation,” in which African captives were led to former slave trading sites on the West African coast, given a medical exam, and “par l’intermédiaire d’un interprète, du contrat qui leur est proposé: il y est question de liberté, de salaire, et d’un éventuel rapatriement à l’issue des années d’engagement (p. 16).” It was under these auspices that the French Guianese folkloric figure, D’Chimbo, found himself as a gold-mining worker upon his arrival in the French colony in South America - an important historical fact to which we will return and which will be explored in more detail later in this study. As we shall see, the D’Chimbo saga contains a significant enough number of issues, themes, and topics of historicity and elements of interest to the examination of colonial discourse and its legacy specific to French Guiana to warrant further exploration through the means of cultural expression found in Patient’s and Stéphenson’s D’Chimbo narratives.

The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in French Guiana were largely defined in terms of the existence of perhaps the most notorious penal colony the world had ever seen – the institution known to the French-speaking world as *le bagne*. However, the territory of French Guiana had already long been a land of exile. Evidence indicates its use by the French government as a land of political deportation as early as 1795, effectuated by the labor shortage on the heels of the initial abolition of slavery in 1794 (Dupont-Gonin p. 52). But, for Louis Napoleon and his government, the exigency to deport 27,000 political prisoners following the coup d’état of 1851 initiated the use of the territory as a penal colony in an official capacity (Redfield, pp. 62-63). Thus, in 1848, began a century-long era in French Guiana which would mark it the world over as a place of barbarous punishment, resulting in a legacy that still haunts the territory to this day. In all of its lengthy history, and in consideration of the many facets of its climate, geography, and ethnic diversity, it is both ironic and unfortunate that this

land of natural and cultural marvels is so often visualized in such a singular and ignominious vein. This inauspicious inheritance seems to permeate, even at present, any existing “national” identity in French Guiana, and effectively, to skew the manner in which its inhabitants see themselves, as well as how others perceive them, and to regularly infect the quantitatively limited artistic expression which does exist and which endeavors to make some sense of and/or record those various phenomena, both cultural as well as natural, which define existence in this land, the oldest of the French colonies. By way of example, let us consider French Guiana’s connection with the term “hell.” Though not original to the penal colony period, the use of the term almost certainly mushroomed during this period (it might be argued that the early disastrous attempt at colonization in Kourou first initiated this terminological association). One need only peruse a bibliography of literature pertaining to *le bagne* to comprehend the distinctive correlation that many perceived between French Guiana and “hell on earth.” Reflecting upon Anglo-centric literature pertaining to the penal colony, Redfield adeptly sums up the idea of linguistically associated infernal imagery:

The titles of works written or marketed in English give a sense of the language in play: *Horrors of Cayenne, Dry Guillotine, Hell on Trial, Devil’s Island, Hell’s Outpost, The Jungle and the Damned, Hell Beyond the Seas, Flag on Devil’s Island, Condemned to Devil’s Island, The Man from Devil’s Island, Isle of the Damned, Loose Among Devils, Damned and Damned Again* (p. 92).

Such titles only begin to describe the extent to which convicts and critics of *le bagne* equated the netherworld of torment and misery with its terrestrial version on the French-controlled northeastern coast of South America, administered by, as they are wont to describe them, the most diabolical of France’s imperial functionaries. It is with such narrative description that the

“history” of French Guiana had, until relatively recently, been recorded, more often than not by foreigner visitors. An illuminating example of this type of anathematizing discourse can be found in the American sailor W.E. Allison-Booth’s *Hell’s Outpost: The True Story of Devil’s Island by a Man Who Exiled Himself There*. First published in 1931, Allison-Booth’s record of his first impressions of the colony is full of images of despair, decay, and misery:

... As we passed along the length of the island, which is approximately one and a half or two miles in circumference, I can see the faint outline of what looked like small huts against a black background. There appeared to be a small bit of vegetation near the edge of the water, but for the most part the island rose bleak and barren out of the waves.

We put in at Cayenne to discharge cargo, and there I saw the first of the prisoners I was to come into contact with later. Surely, I thought, these men could have no fear of the hereafter, their hell being here on Earth, God would take no further toll, if all the stories I had heard were true.

The air was of that particular hot and flat quality that makes it nearly impossible for a white man to work in the tropics (pp. 4-5).

Such a citation reflects well a few of the very typical colonial essentialisms encountered in classic Western travel journals in which not only exoticized races and cultures, but also the unforgiving geography and oppressive climate of the colonized/conquered territories are juxtaposed against the tempered peoples and temperate topology of “civilization.” Highlighting the vision of the superiority of the so-called civilized countries, Albert Memmi demonstrates how even the weather and geography of the colonized, in opposition to the motherland, appear to take on inferior characterization on aesthetic and even moral grounds:



It is remarkable that even for colonizers born in the colony, that is, reconciled to the sun, the heat and the dry earth, the other scenery looks misty, humid, and green. As though their homeland were an essential component of the collective superego of colonizers, its material features become quasi-ethical qualities. It is agreed that mist is intrinsically superior to bright sunshine, as is green to ochre. The mother country thus combines only positive values, good climate, harmonious landscape, social discipline, and exquisite liberty, beauty, morality, and logic (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 60).

Thus we see Boothe's observations are an almost perfect example of Memmi's assertions, reflecting the perceived superiority of the geographical and climactic spaces of colonizing societies. Perhaps even more telling is the last line of Boothe's citation in which the author asserts the racial suitability of working in such an infernal, inhospitable climate - an assertion drawn directly from the racial theories of the 19th and early 20th centuries and which is summarized almost verbatim in Volume 74 (June 5, 1920) of the Journal of the American Medical Association which, in a segment entitled "Physiology of a White Man in the Tropics" argues that, "The experiments showed that it was impossible to continue heavy manual labor under tropical conditions for the same time as in a temperate region without raising the body temperature to a dangerous degree (p. 1588)." Indeed, it was just such arguments which, viewed from the perspective of the colonizer, necessitated and justified the importation of African labor in particular (i.e. slavery, indentured servitude, etc.), as well as that of other peoples from tropical and sub-tropical regions to colonies with climes considered too "extreme" for white European settlers.

An additional description of the natural scenery of French Guiana by Allison-Booth reinforces the notion that the author finds parallels between the hell associated with the penal colony and its physical environment:

On either side of the river stretches a low flat expanse of semi-swamp as far as the eye can reach. The vegetation grows from the water's edge and is as wild and primitive as is possible to conceive. It meets the river, rising only a few feet above its surface, a dank rotting mass of plant and stunted growth, so thick a man could not penetrate it...There was no breeze and only the purling of the water against the bow broke the silence. But the splendour of this jungle verdure and wild growth is depressing. It senses of decay in vegetation — and human life (pp. 8-9).

But as Redfield points out, Allison-Booth's descriptive account is tenuous at best, and indeed, one must ponder the honesty of the narrative, as the author's ubiquitous factual errors undermine any claims as to the accuracy of his text (Redfield, p. 94). Nevertheless, it is with just such narrative that the "history" of the territory in question has been written until recently, and such, as we shall shortly see, is one of the legacies still haunting the land and the people today, which we can see reflected in the words of poem 8 of Serge Patient's short collection entitled *Mal du pays*:

Vous l'avez dans la honte allongée  
et je suis seul témoin de son humiliation (p. 158)

In response to the intensely negative reputation engendered by the deplorable conditions and administrative corruption that permeated the unofficially named Devil's Island penal colony, the decision was made by decree on July 17, 1938 to begin ceasing its operations (Mam Lam Fouck, *Histoire générale*, p. 59). However, the isolation of French colonies in the western

hemisphere during the Second World War forced a delay in the final closure of the notorious penal colony to a later date. Operational closure of *le bagne* was not officially enacted until after the war, and it was in 1947 that the last of its convicts were released, with most returning to the Métropole. At any rate, the dark legacy left behind by this chapter in French Guiana's history is one that continues to permeate the psyches of those inhabiting the land today. In a newspaper article published on December 4, 2006, Guardian columnist Erwin James illustrates the manner in which the penal colony's legacy still causes unease amongst the population:

I made my way to the "port," which turned out to be no more than a patch of wasteland with access to a couple of river pontoons. I asked around, but the tourist trips were available to the Île Royale and from there to St. Joseph's. It was made clear to me that going anywhere near Devil's Island was strictement interdit. So next day I headed for Royale on a tourist catamaran. Soon after we pulled anchor, I asked a Frenchwoman her view of the penal colony history. "Monsieur," she said, "en France c'est un sujet tabou!" ... When I asked her why, she said it still caused embarrassment in her country (James, *Among the Ghosts*).

Conspicuously absent from James's report is the question of whether the "Frenchwoman" he consulted is from the Métropole or is one of the locals. By logical conclusion, as this is a tourist catamaran on which James finds himself, one would have to assume that she is a *métropolitaine*, suggesting that the shame associated with the penal colony's past transcends the borders of French Guiana itself. Regardless, James's citation demonstrates to a certain degree the unease that the memory of the penal colony saga inspires.

The year 1946 witnessed not only the conclusion of the penal colony era in French Guiana, but also the debut of a new and not altogether uncontroversial period in the colony's

history. The year that brought about the departmentalization of the “former” French colonies of Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Réunion ushered in with it yet another chapter in the territory’s extended past as a French “possession.” As with the other *départements d’outre mer* (DOMs), deliberation upon the benefits of departmentalization versus its deleterious effects has been a topic of some contention. This was first perhaps most significantly argued by Damas in the concluding chapter of his anthropological study, *Retour en Guyane*, entitled “Pour ou contre l’assimilation.” Certainly, few can dispute the economic advantages enjoyed by its residents, who, according to a Discovery Channel documentary entitled *Devil’s Island*, as well as the *Oxford Guide to Countries of the World* enjoys “the highest standard of living on the [South American] continent (*Devil’s Island*). Conversely, Mam Lam Fouck argues, any sort of economic aggrandizement instituted through departmentalization is overshadowed by its corresponding loss of cultural and/or political self-determination (*Histoire générale*, p. 155). As we shall see in subsequent chapters, at least two of French Guiana’s currently more recognized literary figures are in agreement with the historian. It shall be another aim of the study to determine to what extent this position is effectively echoed in recent literary and cultural (artistic) production and to what extent such creativity is representative of recent and current populations inhabiting French Guiana.

Despite nominal resistance to departmentalization and a somewhat vociferous independence movement in the 1970s and early 1980s, French Guiana has remained a de facto dependency of the French Republic since 1946 when, as Redfield explains, “the special relationship of the significant remnants of France’s first Empire – Guyane, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion – with the Métropole was written into law (p. 35).” Additionally, French Guiana was officially granted the status of “Région” in 1972, inaugurating yet another

stratum of métropolitain governance. As Dupont-Gonin argues, with the closure of *le bagne*, the territory's most important industry during its years of operation, the first two decades following departmentalization saw French Guiana at its most economically vulnerable (p. 60). Redfield corroborates Dupont-Gonin's assertion, suggesting that heavily subsidized state-funded employment has fueled the most noteworthy economic expansion, further exacerbating an already sizable poverty gap (p. 37). Here we see illustrated Mam Lam Fouck's assertion that economic prosperity comes at a price. It is a price that, more often than not, involves questions of identity for the "indigenous" (i.e. non-European) population of French Guiana as they continue to struggle with finding voices of authenticity, independent of European (i.e. colonialist) ideology in historico-cultural, socio-economic, and other contexts which might otherwise tend to marginalize such voices at the expense of a dominating socio-economic power upon which they may become too dependent. In simpler terms, the anxiety inherent to this idea suggests that the (colonized) peoples of the département run the risk of losing, or even of never quite effectively developing a sense of identity unique to French Guiana and distinct from the Métropole. In his article entitled "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: the Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," Abdul JanMohamed contends that,

... since the colonialist wants to maintain his privileges by preserving the status quo, his representation of the world contains neither a sense of historical becoming, nor a concrete vision of a future different from the present, nor a teleology other than the infinitely postponed process of 'civilizing' (Ashcroft et al., *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, p. 22).

It can thus be argued that the trepidation stemming from never achieving this precise "sense of historical becoming, nor a concrete vision of the future" fuels much of the concern for the

preservation of the status quo of French Guiana as a political and economic dependency of the European French Republic.

Yet, despite these questions of economic disparity and any corresponding questions of identity among various groups within its small, yet diverse population, the economy of French Guiana has experienced a rebound from the years of recession since the Centre Spatial Guyanais (CSG) became operational in 1968. According to Redfield, the proposal to establish a launch site in French Guiana geographically favored the French and European space agencies over the sites of rival American and Soviet launching sites due to its proximity to the equator, a factor that allows less fuel to be expended when launching a vehicle into outer space (p. 124). Thus, the suddenly favorable geographic location coupled with the French lead in European space technology gave birth to French Guiana's most recent and perhaps most historically and economically significant geopolitical role, depending of course, on whose point of view is being expressed. Consulting Serge Mam Lam Fouck's *Histoire générale de la Guyane française*, one is presented with a synopsis of the polemical debate engendered by the presence of the CSG. Despite the independentist overtones of Mam Lam Fouck's interpretation of the general history of French Guiana, the significance of the CSG's economic impact cannot be ignored:

Les activités spatiales jouent donc, depuis les années 1960, un rôle majeur dans la croissance économique. Pratiquement toutes les activités tirent profit de l'expansion du secteur spatial : les services (publics et marchands) qui se sont beaucoup développés depuis la départementalisation ; puis indirectement, du fait de l'élargissement considérable (à l'échelle des données démographiques guyanaises) du marché intérieur, la pêche qui se dota d'un secteur industriel (vivaneaux et crevettes), les industries du bois

qui connurent un regain d'activité et plus particulièrement l'agriculture longtemps parent pauvre du développement économique guyanais (p. 115).

Yet significantly, and, as mentioned above, Mam Lam Fouck argues, there are important counterpoints to any economic growth associated with the CSG, which he summarizes as a dangerous state of dependency:

En retrouvant un certain dynamisme économique la Guyane renoue également avec l'un des caractères essentiels de son économie depuis les débuts de la colonisation : la dépendance à l'égard d'un produit. Toute la Guyane vit en effet au rythme des lancements de satellites – la principale production du pays – que la conjoncture mondiale favorise fortement aujourd'hui. Il me semble que mérite d'être soulignés les risques d'une telle dépendance, qui peut se révéler dramatique en cas de retournement de la conjoncture ou d'une modification technologique majeur qui rendrait obsolète la base spatiale de Kourou (p. 121).

Such exposition clearly reflects the historian's personal apprehension regarding French Guiana's economic dependence on the Métropole, but it perhaps also hints at a wider concern for the reliance, as discussed earlier, on multiple levels, shared by French Guiana's current "indigenous"<sup>4</sup> population – a concern that surely must contribute to any sort of "national" identity crisis and one to which we shall frequently return within the scope of this study in our analysis of the various interpretations of the emblematic D'Chimbo character.

### **Populations after French Colonization: A Brief Demographic Summary**

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<sup>4</sup> The word "indigenous" is a slippery one. Here, it is meant as people who were born and raised in French Guiana as opposed to those born and raised outside of the département, but currently residing within its political boundaries.

In order for us to get a better feel for the exceptional nature of the diversity of the population of French Guiana, and just how such diversity may or may not affect identity, it is necessary to turn our attention to a brief discussion regarding the demographic makeup of the département. As with most colonized spaces in the Americas, demographics in French Guiana have had a long and heterogeneous past. Beginning with the settlement of the first Amerindian populations in approximately 4000 BC, the territory has seen a fair share of differing ethnic groups and races inhabiting its territory. Of the original Amerindian populations, sadly little is known. Nevertheless, Dupont-Gonin, in his ethnological study of 20th century Amerindian groups in French Guiana, illustrates that today's "aboriginal" peoples are descendants of three primary groups: the Arawaks, the Caribs, and the Tupi-Guarani (p. 63). Mam Lam Fouck, for his part, also gives us a very brief overview of Native American demographics prior to and following the arrival of the French:

Certaines ethnies comme les Galibi du groupe linguistique Karib, qui vivaient au début du XVIIe siècle sur le littoral essentiellement entre l'Approuague et le Surinam, occupaient l'espace guyanais bien avant l'arrivée des Français. D'autres comme les Wayana (Karib) et les Wayãpi ne s'installèrent dans l'intérieure que près d'un siècle après l'implantation des premiers établissements français (p. 19).

The evidence thus provided by both Dupont-Gonin and Mam Lam Fouck demonstrates that French Guiana had already been a territory of some considerable multi-ethnic makeup even prior to the arrival of European (French) settlers. Though becoming dated, Dupont-Gonin's study is of value in that it provides us with a concise and accurate overview of the Amerindian populations that continue to inhabit the territory into the present. The ethnologist enumerates the most immediately discernible Amerindian groups, descendants of the three primary linguistic groups



mentioned above: the Galibi (from the Carib group); the Arawak and the Palikour (from the Arawak group); the Oyana or Roucouyenne (from the Tupi-Guarani group); all of this in addition to the Oyampi or Wayãpi and the Émerillon whose linguistic origins are not made clear. Statistics published by the US Central Intelligence Agency in 2006 indicate that the Amerindian peoples who today inhabit the territory comprise roughly 12% of the current overall population in French Guiana. Such data regarding the aboriginal population alone provides evidence of some of the significant diversity, which continues to characterize the territory's populace. The fact of Amerindian diversity was emphasized in the publication of the 2003 edition of *La plume guyanaise*, an annual review of French Guianese literature, in which no fewer than 10 "local" (Amerindian) languages were either featured or invited to be used in future publication submissions, in the aim, as the editors of the review put it, to "[offrir] un terrain d'expressions culturelles et littéraires à toutes les communautés qui peuplent la Guyane... (My emphasis) (p. 9). Hence, we again witness the reality that, in French Guiana, a cohesive, unitary national identity can present itself more much more problematic than in other postcolonial environments simply due to the sheer numbers of differing ethnic groups involved in the composition of the general population.

Despite the already rich ethnic diversity to be found in the territory, it was European expansionism which most significantly altered ethnographic demographics subsequent to contact and conquest. With France ultimately prevailing over other European interests, particularly the Dutch, in taking possession of the specific territory in question, the indigenous population would be introduced to an infusion of new and quite often unsavory occupants. Benign or malign expansionist intentions aside, the mere physical presence of the light skinned conquerors proved significant enough to produce a massive alteration in the ethnic structure of the colonies. In a

study that challenges long-held beliefs concerning the limited numbers of human populations in the Americas immediately prior to and after the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, author Charles C. Mann, citing a study conducted by anthropologist Henry F. Dobyns, argues that perhaps as much as 90 to 95% of all Native American populations were exterminated by two diseases carried by European émigrés (pp. 102-103). While Mann concedes that other scholars dispute this figure, it is nonetheless clear that a population shift of substantial proportions took place with the influx of “Old World” populations into those of the Americas. Such a genocidal legacy, whether intentional or not, has surely infused indigenous folklore with a problematic heritage.

So what were the initial colonial interests of the French in this region? To put it another way, why did France feel the need to conquer, exploit, and control this particular corner of South America? As cited earlier, according to Mam Lam Fouck, motivations in the territory were of a political, economic, and religious order. The territory initially proved useful as a strategic military outpost in addition to irregular and extremely limited success as a space for agricultural exploitation. However, the extreme nature of the climactic conditions and the topography of French Guiana limited its use in a manner favorable to French colonists, and were doubtlessly significant factors in limiting the influx of European immigrants on a *voluntary* basis until the latter half of the 20th century with the installation of the space-base in Kourou. As Albert Memmi argues in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, “The colonized’s devaluation thus extends to everything that concerns him: to his land, which is ugly, unbearably hot, amazingly cold, evil smelling; such discouraging geography that it condemns him to contempt and poverty, to eternal dependence (p. 67).” In this way, the commonly-held colonial racial theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century regarding the correlation between race, climate, and labor doubtlessly played a significant role in

formulating strategies of colonial agricultural exploitation in French Guiana and thus, necessarily affected the importation of agricultural labor and the consequent shaping of demographics both at the time as well as in the future.

In spite of its debatable success as a productive space of agricultural and mineral exploitation, the establishment of a penal colony in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century would initiate a scandalous, yet not insignificant use for the French colony in South America. The institution itself would significantly affect the demographics of the territory during its century of operation, bringing with it an influx of those dubious “citizens” whom the Métropole considered societal refuse. But it was not until the mid-1960s that the introduction of an entirely new type of European, highly educated for the most part, would populate the shores of French Guiana. However, it was not the simple presence of Europeans themselves in the colony that would most appreciably alter the composition of the demographic structure. Rather, it was the colonialist’s importation of the African slave that proved, at the time, as well as today, to be the most significant historical factor to permanently shape the configuration of the population of French Guiana. Today, the population of French Guiana’s descendants of the African Diaspora accounts for a substantial 66% of the total population, making it by far the most statistically significant racial group in the département.

In our overview of the various demographic groups associated with French Guiana’s past and present, and for the purposes of the subject matter to be explored further on in this study, it is critical to briefly consider those assemblages of cultural communities initially established by runaway slaves, known collectively as “maroons,” whose descendants continue to lead a unique way of life not altogether dissimilar to that of their ancestors. The utility of taking a closer, albeit abbreviated, look at this demographic element of French Guiana will become increasingly

apparent in subsequent chapters as the historical, cultural, and literary heritage of the D'Chimbo legend that is itself the focus of the study, becomes more relevant; for it is through the social and cultural constructs of the maroon collectivities that the D'Chimbo legend is most often encountered. Detailing a voyage of anthropologic inquiry conducted in the mid-1950s, naturalists Henry Larsen and May Pellaton, in a published study entitled *Behind the Lianas*, chronicled their encounters with a small number of social groups still known in the 20<sup>th</sup> (and into the 21<sup>st</sup>) century in the French language as “marrons.” In the following citation, Larsen and Pellaton aim to provide their readers with an introduction to, and overview of, the maroon phenomenon, while hinting at the confusion that Western scholars had routinely encountered in attempting similar field studies:

In 1786, when Negro slaves were running away in numbers from the Dutch plantations and taking refuge in the jungle, some of the fugitives crossed the Maroni and settled on the French bank...

As time passed, the ‘Bonis’ (so named after their first chief) formed a ‘nation’ which is now officially recognized by the government. They are the only tribal Negroes considered as French subjects and consider themselves superior to the other ‘Marrons’ (people of the Maroni region) – the Boschs, or Youcas, the Paramacas and the Saramacas, who, though settled in Guiana, have remained subject to the Dutch crown.

When we first arrived I often confused the Boschs and the Bonis – an unforgivable mistake – but in time I was able to distinguish them as easily as I could between Negro canoes and Indian (pp. 61-62).

As suggested in Larsen and Pellaton’s text, during the height of the plantation era, numbers of African slaves succeeded in escaping from various plantations and mining operations in the

Guianas, eventually reproducing villages or settlements similar to the African societies from which they had initially been abducted. Furthermore, as per Larsen and Pellaton, maroon descendants in French Guiana belong to one of four principal groups: the Boni (or Aluku), the Youca (or Bosch), the Paramaca, and the Saramaca, of whom perhaps the most well-known are the Boni (p. 61). In *Histoire générale de la Guyane française*, Mam Lam Fouck confirms the assertion of the founders of these communities as slaves from Dutch Guiana fleeing their captors across the Maroni River (pp. 137-138). On the other hand, it would appear that large-scale slave rebellions were virtually nonexistent in French colonial territory itself in South America (p. 137). Nevertheless, maroon societies comprised of runaway slaves who managed to successfully evade their Dutch pursuers, as well as any French colonial interference, did indeed persist, as witnessed by the continued existence of distinct communities of their descendants. However, detailed “histories” of these communities, like those of Amerindian cultures in French Guiana, are virtually nonexistent in the Western academic sense due to a lack of any written record chronicling their pasts. In June of 2005, Radio France International reporter Frédéric Farine highlighted the absence of written historical accounts of these communities in an article entitled “Jean Moomou éclaire l’histoire des Noirs marrons Bonis.” The fairly brief yet illuminating article presents readers with an introduction to a young historian, Jean Moomou, described by Farine as “le premier Boni à retracer l’histoire de son peuple qui s’est libéré de l’esclavage colonial (Farine).” One of Moomou’s more revealing anecdotes about his (Western-style) educational experience as a student at a lycée in Cayenne not only illustrates the obscurity of his people to those living outside of his own community, but also offers insight into why Western scholars may have traditionally had difficulty in accurately or consistently writing extensively about the maroon elements of the French Guianese population: “Les élèves m’appelaient

‘Saramaka’ (autre group de marrons). Je répliquais: ‘ça ne me gêne pas, mais vous ignorez votre propre histoire, tout descendant de noir marron n’est pas Saramaka’ (Farine).” Moomou’s anecdote is perhaps even more revealing given that, as he was born in 1977, the incident he recounts would have occurred in the 1990s, placing further emphasis upon the continued cultural ignorance regarding maroons in French Guiana.

Larsen and Pellaton’s account of their encounter with two of the aforementioned maroon communities, the Boni and the Youca, is of interest from a linguistic point of view in that their chronicle, published on the eve of the great decolonization movements of the 1960s, reflects a persistent language of attitudinal European superiority over the ethnic groups which they generalize as “primitive” and, in at least one instance, “savage,” in a manner evocative of Fanon’s assertion that “Negroes” are universally essentialized by Westerners as savages (*The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 211). However, far from being an overtly, purposely racist text, *Behind the Lianas* is written in a style that also invokes Edward Saïd’s observations regarding Western academic fascination with the romanticized, exotic “other,” but which still maintains an air of intellectual and cultural superiority. With the exception of Moomou’s recently published *Le Monde des Marrons du Maroni en Guyane (1772-1860)*, descriptions of quotidian maroon existence have been left to Western scholars such as Larsen and Pellaton and to Jean Hurault, whose 1963 study, *Les Noirs Réfugiés Boni de la Guyane française*, continues to be the most widely cited reference regarding maroon culture, though now nearly a half a century old. Thus, again we witness the notion lamented by the Ndaganos (cf. Introduction, *Introduction à la littérature guyanaise*) and others that, at least within a Western academic context, yet another historically marginalized ethnic community is “spoken on behalf of” by a group of people whose light-skinned ancestors claimed cultural, linguistic, and biological superiority, and continue to do

so, to varying degrees, intentionally or otherwise, to this very day. It is within this context that the D'Chimbo legend and its literary "offspring" will be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

Returning for a moment to the influence of French colonization upon population demographics as it pertains to French Guiana, one must consider that very important element, known as "Creole," whose definition, like maroon, can also be quite problematic. For this reason, in particular within a study concerning cultural expression, and also in light of the Créoliste manifesto, *Éloge de la Créolité*, a significant document pertaining to Caribbean region Creole cultural expression, we will turn to Mam Lam Fouck's clarification of the term as it applies to French Guiana, and adopt it for the purposes of our current discussion of demographic patterns in the département:

Une clarification de la terminologie que j'utilise s'impose ici. Les Antilles françaises, la Réunion et bien des pays de la Caraïbe et des Amériques ont conservé jusqu'à nos jours une classe sociale de Blancs créoles. En Guyane, du fait de sa disparition, le terme de créole désigne les Mulâtres de l'Ancien régime, les Noirs libérés en 1848 et les immigrants de toute race et de toute origine qui se sont fondu dans le creuset créole. Les Créoles de Guyane sont donc essentiellement des métis d'origines variées (*Histoire générale*, p. 140).

Mam Lam Fouck subsequently provides his readers with an overview of the Creole role in the evolution of French Guianese society. In so doing, he argues that, with the final abolition of slavery in the colony in 1848, the white colonialist elite were replaced by a Creole bourgeoisie (p. 138), a historical phenomenon that is not itself exclusive to French Guiana. The subsequent shortage of manual labor prompted by abolition resulted in the "ruin" of the plantations, followed by a sizable exodus of white colonists (p. 139). But, as the citation above suggests, a

very clear definition of who may or may not be considered “Creole” in French Guiana can be evasive, and indeed the definition is often treated summarily or even ignored by the few scholars who have conducted demographic or ethnologic studies of the population, preferring instead to focus on the region’s more “exotic” communities. Thus, almost by default, the Creole element of the population at large may find itself to be struggling more than others to gain any cohesive sense of identity within such a diversified populace. This is an issue that Mam Lam Fouck explores more profoundly elsewhere in the published proceedings from a symposium held on April 21<sup>st</sup> 1995, entitled *L’Identité guyanaise en question* (pp. 67-84). In his *Histoire générale de la Guyane française*, however, Mam Lam Fouck, additionally implies that it is precisely this identity crisis that has prompted Creole political tendencies to actively seek out and advocate assimilation with France and perhaps continues to impede separationist movements on a larger scale (p. 140).

After the final liberation of the slaves in 1848, and the subsequent decline of the plantation economy of French Guiana, French colonial authorities were at a loss as to what to do with its South American colony now that the agricultural productivity was negligible or even deficient. This doubtlessly weighed heavily in the ultimate decision to use the territory as a penal colony. Between 1848 and 1946, the majority of white Métropolitains arriving in the colony, aside from the convicts themselves, were state functionaries assigned either to the penal administration, or the colonial administration itself. It was about this time also that colonial authorities began active recruitment of manual labor sources from the Near and the Far East. The descendants of those recruits still comprise a small, but no less perceptible minority in present-day French Guiana. At any rate, between 1848 and 1946, European immigration remained limited or even in decline as the colony simultaneously experienced the expanding



influence of the Creole bourgeoisie. Yet the ever-changing demographics of the colony did not mark the end of white European “immigration.” With the construction of the European Space Agency complex in Kourou in 1968 came an influx of new European immigrants, which continues at present. Most of these new arrivals are highly educated and bring with them ideas and values that are often at odds with those held by residents whose families have inhabited the territory for far longer.

The diversity of French Guiana’s population is succinctly summarized by Redfield, who, speculating on the number of differing ethnic groups, cites Ken Bilby’s unpublished 1990 dissertation on maroon identity: “if one were to count all the finer distinctions made, the list could easily pass a hundred (Redfield, p. 43).” Redfield also provides us with a concise summary of late 20<sup>th</sup> century demographics in French Guiana which, although becoming dated, nonetheless gives us an idea of the general status of current population statistics in terms of percentages:

An imperfect ethnic breakdown in 1985, prior to the major influx of Brazilian and Maroon refugees, ran as follows : Guyanais Creoles 43 percent, Haitians 22 percent, Metropolitans 8 percent, Maroons 6 percent, Brazilians 6 percent, French Antillean Creoles 5 percent, Amerindians 4 percent, Anglophone Caribbeans 3 percent, Chinese 1 percent, Hmong 1 percent, and Surinam Creoles 1 percent (p. 44).

### **The Problematic of Identity: Questions of Guyanité**

With this brief historical and current-day demographic overview of French Guiana in mind, it becomes clear why many present-day French Guianese scholars, artists, and others are very much concerned with issues of identity as they exist in their country at present. It is evident

that, based on the rather exceptional composition of its population, anything resembling a cohesive identity in French Guiana would be, and in fact is, problematic. As cited earlier in the introduction to this study, the editors of the literary anthology, *Introduction à la littérature guyanaise*, have attempted to address, or at least acknowledge the implications of this question of unresolved identity. In one of the sole publications to examine the issue of identity in French Guiana, the Ndaganos explain, in French Guianese terms, the complexity of “national identity” as it exists today:

La question de l'identité guyanaise est loin d'être résolue et embarrasse aussi bien les sociologues que les divers exégètes par ses contours mal définis. Dès lors qu'il n'existe pas d'état ou de nation guyanaise, dès l'instant où la mention « guyanais » ne figure sur aucun document d'identification, la définition revêt des limites floues (pp. 10-11).

The terms used by the Ndaganos in the citation above point to an absence or deficiency of *political identity* on the part of the present-day “indigenous” population, but questions regarding “guyanité” do not stop there. As the editors imply, the lack or ineffectiveness of political identity under the shadow of the governmental and cultural dominating impact of the Métropole is inextricably tied to an historical crisis of cultural identity as the French Guianese have struggled to define their role in the world at large and within the larger political entity which has for centuries endeavored to maintain a certain status quo which has left many, if not most of them with a sense of alienation on political, cultural, and economic grounds. With the presentation of their literary anthology, the Ndaganos appear intent on addressing a few of these issues by highlighting cultural production in and about the département, which they argue has been either ignored or marginalized.

Although occasionally cited by French Caribbean theorists and scholars, there still appears to be little *specific* mention of French Guiana in historic and literary explorations, introductions, and anthologies of the greater region. It is significant that particular attention to works of French Guianese, literature, as corroborated by the Ndaganos as well as by Martin and Favre, is lacking. But can this perfunctory cultural consideration be linked directly to the relatively small general population of French Guiana, or are there other reasons involved? By way of example, the reader of the theoretical writings of Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, among other Caribbean-based literary and cultural theorists, is treated to brief references to French Guianese cultural production, but one is also struck by the marked absence of substantial or unique treatment of French Guiana and its literary and cultural representation. This persistent deficiency is characterized by the Ndaganos in the introduction to their literary anthology as a “general indifference” towards literature originating from their homeland (p. 16). By way of example, one often encounters the name of Léon-Gontran Damas in association with French Guiana and its literary production, but one could also easily argue that he has appeared as more of a representative of the global Négritude movement than as a specific representative of that movement which A. James Arnold has succinctly defined as the “collective venture intended to bring together on the common ground of blackness the students from Africa and those from the West Indies (p. 8).” As the Négritude movement has been criticized as essentializing or universalizing differing black cultures throughout the world (Ashcroft et al., *Key Concepts* p. 162; Loomba p. 213), it is not surprising that Damas’s connections to French Guiana may be overshadowed by his role as a spokesperson for the validation of black culture in generalized, global, and perhaps unified terms. That is not to say, however, that Damas’s poetry completely ignores its author’s own sense of *guyanité*. Indeed, many of his works call upon his

personal experiences and cultural frame of reference vis-à-vis his native French Guiana. Referring to Damas as “certainement le plus africain des poètes de la Négritude,” the Ndaganos suggest that the focus of Damas’s work proves more of an indictment of (French) colonial discourse on a global scale rather than as an affirmation of his own “national” Guianese identity (p. 158). Despite Damas’s political *engagement* (e.g. as *député* from French Guiana) and his poetry’s unparalleled importance regarding the subsequent evolution of literary expression in French Guiana, his contributions remain relatively unseen by a larger audience, under-appreciated, and even, as the Ndaganos argue, unknown “dans l’espace français, encore moins, hélas, dans son propre pays (p. 156).” Nevertheless, under-appreciated and obscure though he may remain in terms of international literary recognition, Damas’s work has inspired “la plupart des poètes guyanais” to follow him (Ndagano and Blérald-Ndagano, p. 169). Two of these *poètes* specifically mentioned as successors to Damas are Serge Patient, author of *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, and Elie Stéphenon, Damas’s literary heir apparent, and to borrow Ndagano’s term, “complete disciple.”

In the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Serge Patient and Elie Stéphenon have both addressed, in different literary formats, the D’Chimbo legend introduced earlier. The question might be asked why should a pair of Damas’s politically engaged literary successors concern themselves with a legend that until recently has left French Guiana with an otherwise dubious and haunting legacy? However, as shall be demonstrated, the D’Chimbo legend addresses these issues, and may provide some insight into how the French Guianese population, or at least a significant portion thereof, views itself through its own “history” and in the face of European colonialism.

Having established an historical, demographic, and literary overview of issues pertinent to our examination of “national culture” as it exists in French Guiana, it is time to turn our attention to a brief introduction to the authors, texts, characters, and themes to be examined in subsequent chapters of the current study.

### **The Legend of D’Chimbo: Savage Criminal or Cult Hero?**

Research into the historical and literary figure of D’Chimbo has resulted in limited and in widely contrasting descriptions of the immigrant turned criminal. These differing interpretations of the D’Chimbo figure are indicative of the colonial and “postcolonial” perceptions of the various peoples (in opposition) engaged, at different levels, in the colonization of French Guiana.

Perhaps the most objective description of certain biographical details regarding the historical figure of D’Chimbo comes to us from Florence Martin, who, citing the historian Serge Mam Lam Fouck, tells us that D’Chimbo was born circa 1828 in the African nation of Gabon where he was eventually sold into a state of de facto slavery (p. 21). Martin further elucidates D’Chimbo's arrival in Cayenne on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, 1858, where he was assigned to work for the “Compagnie aurifère et agricole de l’Approuague” for a period of a few months (p. 22). It seems apparent that soon after his arrival in Cayenne, D’Chimbo’s alleged “reign of terror” began. The exact details regarding this “reign of terror” are somewhat unclear, but what is known is that his mere reputation caused a significant amount of trepidation and consternation among the French colonial inhabitants at the time, although it is quite possible that escalating gossip may have played a significant role in D’Chimbo’s notoriety as a murderer, thief, rapist, and vagabond. Found on a website affiliated with the Association Socioculturelle Guyane-Québec which features descriptions of key figures of French Guianese history and culture is a

reproduction of a purported caption that appears beneath a museum portrait of D'Chimbo, which reads as follows:

D'CHIMBO a.k.a. "The Rongou" (1828 – 1862)

D'CHIMBO, African of the Rongou Tribe, born in GABON (French Congo) circa 1828, arrived in FRENCH GUIANA on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1858, as an immigrant, #1144. Employed by the Compagnie des Mines d'or de l'APPROUAGUE, sentenced to three months in prison on charges of assault and battery, he escaped from the Cayenne jail on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, 1860 and survived nearly a year and a half in the jungle, in the region of Cayenne, subsisting solely by plundering, robbing the inhabitants, attacking the isolated passersby, women most of all, and committing multiple thefts, rapes, and murders. Small but stocky and prodigiously muscled, his front teeth filed down to points, tattooed on his chest, stomach, and back, his entire body covered with saber cuts and bullet wounds, D'Chimbo combined his Herculean strength with an incredible agility. He holed himself up in the most impenetrable parts of the jungle, beneath the wind of the paths which he surveyed without being seen, he rushed upon his victims with an unbelievable impetuosity and disappeared into the shadows with such nimbleness that any pursuit was in vain. Armed solely with a worn out machete, he seemed heedless of the rifle shots aimed at him and was reputed to be invulnerable.

A price having been put on his head, D'Chimbo, after managing to elude all of the search parties ordered at the behest of the terrorized population, was finally captured on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, 1861, at two o'clock in the morning on the "La Folie" plantation, where he had gone to look for fire. He was captured after an intense struggle, by the two immigrants ANGUILAYE and TRANQUILLE, Rongous like himself.

According to popular legend, TRANQUILLE succeeded in wounding D'Chimbo with a rifle shot thanks only to a magic spell; having boiled his bullets with strips of maripa. Bound, taken to Cayenne at daybreak, put back into jail, D'Chimbo made a partial confession to the judge, Monsieur Frédéric BESSE.

He appeared before the trial court on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, 1861, presided over by Monsieur BAUDOIN, and was condemned to death on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August. His execution took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1862 in the marketplace in Cayenne. On ascending the scaffold, as the Reverend Father GUYODO, Parish Priest of Cayenne was exhorting him to repent and describing the heavenly rewards to him, D'Chimbo responded “Dabo, pis ça si bon, pou kiça to pa ra pran'mo plas (Well then, since it is so nice, why don't you take my place?).”

President of the Patronage Committee

of the Local Museum

Emile MERWART (D'CHIMBO dit le Rongou)<sup>5</sup>

Assuming that this caption is of a faithful and accurate reproduction of the caption beneath a portrait of D'Chimbo displayed in a local museum in Cayenne, the text itself is of significant interest to the current study due to its direct contrast with the depiction of the D'Chimbo character in the texts of Serge Patient and Elie Stéphenon. The text cited above is more consistent with Bouyer's representation of D'Chimbo than that of either Patient or Stéphenon, as will be demonstrated in the chapters that follow. Such a distinction illustrates quite clearly the interpretive contrast of this one particular aspect of French Guianese history and the juxtaposing

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<sup>5</sup> My translation. See original text in Appendix A.

perceptions of the colonizing power against the descendants of the people it colonized. This, in turn, supports the argument that Patient and Stéphenson's texts act as a vehicle of resistance and redefinition of French Guianese history in an attempt to define their own identity, as opposed to one imposed upon their culture and society by French and European colonial discourse.

### **Fanon & National Culture: The French Guianese Connection**

In the fourth chapter of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, the Martinican psychiatrist discusses his own analysis of the implications of a subjugated nation's culture in the struggle against colonialism. Before proceeding with an examination of Fanon's chapter as it pertains to the tiny yet very diverse population of French Guiana, it is necessary to examine the term "nation" within a postcolonial context. However, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out in *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, defining (a) "nation" can be problematic (p. 150). The authors explain that the definition of nationhood often fails to completely encompass *all* of the differing elements of which a "nation" is composed: "Such signifiers of homogeneity always fail to represent the diversity of the actual "national" community for which they purport to speak, and in practice, usually represent and consolidate the interests of the dominant power groups within any national formation (Ashcroft et al., p. 150). In *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Ania Loomba corroborates the difficulties inherent in defining nationhood, alongside race, as any particular homogenous totality: "Both nations and races are imagined as communities which bind fellow human beings and demarcate them from others. Both speak to members of all classes and genders (although this does not mean that all classes and genders are treated as equal within them) (p. 118)." Thus, it is apparent that even the very classification of the term "nation" already presents challenges that must be overcome in the creation of a self-styled "national culture." For



the present-day population of French Guiana this can be even more problematic, given the large diversity and significant cultural differences amongst the ethnic groups with the population. But in the interest of clarity for the purposes of our discussion as it is presented here, it is perhaps best to borrow a definition of the term “nation” from the editors of *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, which expands upon Loomba’s discussion of the term: “it is the concept of a *shared* (my emphasis) community, one which Benedict Anderson calls an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983: 15) which has enabled post-colonial societies to invent a self image through which they could act to liberate themselves from imperialist oppression (p. 151).”

A modern English language dictionary might define the term ‘legacy’ as a “thing handed down by a predecessor (Abate, p. 452).” It is not too far of a stretch, then, to argue that postcolonial cultural, historical, and literary inheritances can and do evolve as a direct consequence of colonial domination. In terms of cultural production, Fanon illustrates this point in *The Wretched of the Earth* by asserting that “[at] the very moment when the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work, he fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country (p. 223).” In point of fact, this idea is certainly at the very heart of much postcolonial literary debate. What is therefore needed for the purposes of the current discussion is an examination of general French cultural legacies, first established in the colonial era, as well as a further specific interrogation of the ‘legacy’ left behind by the writings of Frédéric Bouyer – specifically that work entitled *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d’un voyage effectué en 1851- 1852*. For in spite of the relative global and “national” obscurity into which Bouyer has descended, both from a literary point of view, and as an historical figure of any particular note, his chronicle has nevertheless left an imprint upon the historical consciousness and upon the domain of scholarly research with regard to French

Guiana. Before an in-depth analysis of Bouyer's legacy is begun, however, a word of explanation is needed due to the fact that, taken out of context, the assertion just proposed might well appear contradictory.

Extensive scholarly research into the direct influence of Monsieur Bouyer's texts reveals very few substantive resources that thoroughly analyze or even attempt to study the text in question to any remarkable degree of depth. Yet actual discovery of sources that either mention or cite Bouyer's travel chronicle appears to be a much less daunting task. In other words, research sources are not hesitant to point to Bouyer's *Notes* in order to emphasize a particular historic, geographic, etc. point. A number of historical, geographical, and sociological texts mention Bouyer's published observations, but most, if not all, do so on a largely superficial level. This pattern of casual or even cursory reference to Bouyer's *Notes* is far more readily available to the researcher than are substantial analyses of the chronicle itself. To date, only Martin and Favre, the Ndaganos, and the historian Mam Lam Fouck have even attempted to present any kind of real interpretation or analysis of the text.

In the case of the Ndagano anthology, the analysis of Bouyer's *Notes* is afforded only two concise paragraphs; the first describing Bouyer's purpose in writing his journal, and a second offering an all too brief interpretation of his writing style. The editors contend that Bouyer's text, although relatively objective in its approach, is distinctive from other travel chronicles in its humoristic and "real" (i.e. factual) portrayal of historical events, while other texts by other metropolitan travelers to French Guiana of the same era present the country in a more romanticized context (p. 61). Apart from this cursory offering, no in-depth analysis of the text is offered. However, the brevity of the editors' commentary is counterbalanced by their acknowledgment of the comparatively factual authority ceded to Bouyer's text, an occurrence

that is often repeated by other scholars citing the same work. In conducting a closer examination of Bouyer's chronicle, the current study proposes an analysis of the text to determine the extent to which it represents systematized colonial discourse from the French métropolitain perspective in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. Additionally, the cultural and social influences of Bouyer's text, to which the texts of Patient and Stéphenson address their audiences at a later date in history, will be investigated.

As discussed earlier, and to put it into more succinct terms, the general aim of the current study is to provide a greater understanding of the cultural and social marginalization of French Guiana in the past as well as at present. As alluded to by Monique Blérald-Ndagano and Biringanine Ndagano in the introduction to *Introduction à la littérature guyanaise*, French Guianese literature has all too often been grouped together almost imprudently with French Caribbean literature due to simple geographical, historical, and political proximities (p. 7). It is suggested that this categorization is itself representative of yet another generalization that tends to further marginalize the (cultural) realities of present-day French Guiana by lumping it together with a larger region but with which it has marked past and present differences. The still relative obscurity of French Guianese authors and literature among postcolonial specialists is, one could argue, indicative of this condition. The following chapters are intended to highlight the attempts of two particular writers from even the most marginalized of cultures to explore issues of identity regarding their nation, socially, culturally and historically, *by themselves* and *for themselves* in an attempt to distinguish the colonial past as it pertains specifically to the French Guianese experience. Perhaps in so doing, the following chapters will serve as an informative contribution to the field of postcolonial literary studies with its aspirations of letting *all* voices be heard, in the recuperation of marginalized, lost, or erased history, and in an effort to gain a more complete and

humanistic understanding of the distinctions defining human existence throughout time and the implications thereof for the future.

## Chapter 2: The Legacy of Capitaine Frédéric Bouyer

### A Note on the Life of Capitaine Bouyer

It has been argued, by critics of the intentional and biographical fallacies, such as proponents of New Criticism (1920s-1950s), that seeking familiarity with any one author's biographical details is a gratuitous undertaking that has little or no bearing on a solid analytical understanding of the work in question. However, as this idea pertains to the current study, it would indeed be pertinent to mention certain elements of the biography of Frédéric Bouyer, especially as they bear relevance upon a more thorough reading of *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863* which, despite the author's claims to the contrary, is in fact a highly personalized and opinionated travel journal. The sheer volume of subjective commentary contained in the work necessitates at least some examination of Bouyer's biography, if only for purposes of contextualization. Indeed, in *D'Chimbo: du criminel au héros*, Mam Lam Fouck reminds readers that the observations regarding the D'Chimbo saga as recounted in Bouyer's *Notes* "doivent être replacées dans le contexte de l'idéologie coloniale du milieu du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle (p. 9)." Mam Lam Fouck's advice is quite astute, for as will be clarified, one would be hard-pressed to find a text or an author more representative of or sustaining to the French colonial enterprise of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Familiarization with the few biographical details available to us will also facilitate a more complete awareness of the context of Bouyer's *Notes*.

In point of fact, details surrounding the life of Frédéric Bouyer are scarce. History, such as it is, remembers Bouyer in an annotative or even anecdotal manner. A prime example of this sort of ancillary historical relegation can be found in Bernard Montabo's two-volume, 709-page work, *Le Grand livre de l'histoire de Guyane*, where Bouyer is ceded all of the following

mention: “Dans une moindre mesure, moins point inintéressante, le récit du capitaine de frégate Frédéric Bouyer, en 1862-1863, nous laisse un bon témoignage de la Guyane de l’époque” (Vol. 2, p. 353). Of the comparatively few sources which actually cite Bouyer’s writings, a fair portion do so in the cursory manner just illustrated. At the risk of redundancy, we may cite another case in point:

En 1862, le capitaine de frégate Frédéric Bouyer écrivait dans son journal de voyage :

*On donne le nom de Guyane à cette vaste contrée de l’Amérique équinoxiale qui est comprise entre l’Orénoque, l’Amazone, le Rio-Negro et la mer. Le Rio-Négro qui la limite à l’ouest, sert en même temps de trait d’union aux deux grands fleuves qui la bordent au nord et au sud* (Huyghues-Belrose, p. 1).

In the particular instance illustrated immediately above, this opening citation of the article entitled *Aux origines du nom Guyane: essai de toponymie historique* represents the sole mention of Bouyer’s work throughout the entire 10-page essay. Thus, as exemplified in both quotations, we find that Bouyer’s *Notes* is a work that *is* occasionally remembered, but often in only in a cursory sense.

From the limited information available, it is accepted that Bouyer’s primary role in recorded history was as commander of the French navy’s steam frigate, the *Alecton* and as the author of two written works -- the nonfictional *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d’un voyage exécuté en 1861-1862*, and the fictional *L’Amour d’un monstre: scènes de la vie créole* -- both texts that are somewhat obscure and not readily available to the casual reader (at least not within the United States), but texts which survive to our era nonetheless.

In keeping with the idea of Bouyer as an almost anecdotal figure in French colonial history, one curious episode, which is recounted rather briefly in the *Notes*, appears to have

influenced, to a rather significant degree, the writing of Jules Verne in one of that author's most recognizable novels. In the second chapter of *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863*, Bouyer narrates the encounter of the crew of the *Alecton*, en route to French Guiana, with what he calls *le Poulpe Géant* – the giant squid. While treated almost as a side note within the travel chronicle itself, the encounter appears to have been of significant enough interest to Verne to appear in fictionalized form in the 1870 sci-fi classic *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*. In Chapter XVIII of the *Deuxième partie* of Verne's tale of the enigmatic Captain Nemo, entitled *Les poulpes*, Nemo's three captives, Aronnax, Conseil and Ned Land, find themselves discussing tales of giant squid encounters and the veracity or likelihood of such encounters, when Aronnax presents his cohorts with the following evidence:

En 1861, dans le nord-est de Ténériffe, à peu près par la latitude où nous sommes en ce moment, l'équipage de l'avisio l'Alecton aperçut un monstrueux calmar qui nageait dans ses eaux. Le commandant Bouguer s'approcha de l'animal, et il l'attaqua à coups de harpon et à coups de fusil, sans grand succès, car balles et harpons traversaient ces chairs molles comme une gelée sans consistance. Après plusieurs tentatives infructueuses, l'équipage parvint à passer un nœud coulant autour du corps du mollusque. Ce nœud glissa jusqu'aux nageoires caudales et s'y arrêta. On essaya alors de haler le monstre à bord, mais son poids était si considérable qu'il se sépara de sa queue sous la traction de la corde, et, privé de cet ornement, il disparut sous les eaux (Verne).

Aronnax's version of the tale is remarkably similar to the one recounted in Bouyer's *Notes*, and indeed, as Ellis, as well as many others have demonstrated, it is almost certain that Verne drew his inspiration directly from Bouyer's encounter (Ellis, pp. 143-144). The exact date and location of the giant squid encounter with the crew of the *Alecton*, as well as the similarity of the

commander's name, Bouguer, to that of Bouyer himself, leave us with little doubt as to the source of Verne's inspiration. Thus it would seem that although Bouyer's biographical record and his literary works may have left him with a less than remarkable individual legacy, his chance meeting with a cryptic creature may have afforded him a place within the footnotes of literature and natural sciences, the virtues of which his texts seem so abundantly eager to extol.

Bouyer himself leaves us with few details regarding his own personal history. In the nonfictional *Notes* published in 1867 by Hachette, a volume encompassing some 316 pages in length, he only provides us with four adjectives of self-description: "breton, catholique, apostolique, et romain (p. 4)." Sparse depiction indeed, but perhaps enough with which to better comprehend some of the linguistic choices and cultural references that he makes in presenting his travel narrative.

### **The Voyage to Cayenne: Placing Bouyer's Notes into Context**

The primary focus of this chapter of the current study will be upon the fourth chapter of Bouyer's *Notes*, entitled "Le Brigand D'Chimbo: ses crimes, son arrestation, sa mort," for it is the D'Chimbo character and his saga which are the linking elements of the authors, Bouyer, Patient, and Stéphenson, whose texts are themselves the center of the current study as a whole. However, a brief introduction to the opening sections of Bouyer's *Notes* may provide a useful framework upon which a more thorough analysis of Chapter IV can be constructed.

Similar to the *Deuxième partie* of the chronicle, the *Première partie*, which recounts the highlights of the Aleuton's voyage from Toulon to Cayenne, strikes the observant, postmodern reader as flush with instances of French national, cultural, class, and racial superiority, abundant citation of classical antiquity, a generous infusion of scientific and literary digression, and a strongly opinionated comparison of the French and British colonial empires. In short, the



undertones of the text in this *Première partie* reflect the writing of an individual who is very much a product of his time and circumstances. It is worthwhile to take a closer look at a few of the more noteworthy passages from this first part of Bouyer's chronicle as a way of establishing how the text reflects a very standard 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialist worldview that not only shaped Métropolitain daily life at the time as well as in the decades which followed, but which would also profoundly affect individuals and populations as seemingly distant and alien as the ones depicted in Bouyer's *Notes*.

In terms of nationalism or the notion of national superiority, or what one might perhaps even term a nationalistic text, Bouyer's *Notes* establishes itself as an advocate of such almost immediately. A mere few pages into the first chapter of the *Première partie*, in reference to France's naval power, the text appears to invoke the nation's destiny predicated upon such a legacy of seafaring dominance, and the reader already begins to witness the national, imperial, and/or colonial imperatives that will come to characterize a sizeable portion of the chronicle as a whole. The lesson here is of the historical importance of naval strength.

Il appartenait à une nation jeune et qui marche à pas géant vers l'avenir, à une nation qui doit sa force et sa vitalité puissante à la mer, d'établir les bases et les lois organiques de ce milieu inconnu (p. 5).

Although the passage specified here reflects the time-honored notion that "he who rules the sea, rules the world" in a non-specific sense vis-à-vis France, it nonetheless alerts the reader to the author's advocacy of maritime power as a basis and as a projection of expanding imperial aspiration(s). Although certainly not an idea unique to Bouyer, it is interesting to note that his manifested belief in the importance of the projection of naval power as a "key to national greatness" (Thomas, p. 23), as expressed in the passage, preceded Alfred Thayer Mahan's

codification of the idea (which came to be known as ‘navalism’) in *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*, published in 1890, by some 24 years. At any rate, the passage extols the undeniable link between maritime strategy and the growth of empire. The reader is struck by the image of strength projected in the vocabulary used in the passage. The use of such potent terms as “*pas de géant*,” “*force*,” “*vitalité*,” and “*puissante*” leaves little doubt as to the almost hubristic assumption that the *Alecton*, in her mission to French Guiana, will play her part in France’s march towards a glorious future. Ominously, however, the *pas de géant* paradoxically also implies a readiness to crush any opposition, lending weight to the idea that the tacitly assumed national ambitions should not nor could be opposed. Furthermore, the added authority of the terms *lois organiques* within the same sentence suggests a certain constitutional claim to any such national objectives. Thus, the statement serves as a consummate example of the justification of imperial design inextricably linked to aspirations of nationalistic ascendancy and, ultimately, hegemony.

The assertion of nationalistic pre-eminence, and, by extension, cultural supremacy established so quickly within the text of Bouyer’s *Notes* is echoed in the second chapter in a passage in which the author elucidates reasons for and further rationalization of France’s colonial and/or imperial designs. Yet this time, there is an unconcealed addendum of regret and hesitation to the nationalistic and narcissistic observation of expansionist validation:

Si jamais nation fut prédestinée aux conquêtes, c’est évidemment la France. Nous avons le génie qui conçoit, le courage qui exécute ; nous avons ce je ne sais quoi qui fait aimer en nous jusqu’à l’épée du conquérant et nous fait pardonner nos triomphes. Malheureusement nous ne savons pas garder ce que nous avons su prendre (p. 23).

As in the passage analyzed previously, the passage cited here serves as a justification of expansionist ideology and conquest to that nation, the text argues, which is worthy in some manner or another of such ideology and conquest. Additionally, both passages advocate some sort of natural or divine right to such aims. This passage, however, unlike the previous one, in which France's expansionist rationalization is implied, addresses the nation's imperial/colonial aspirations explicitly and as such, can be viewed as all the more nationalistic and even racially-oriented in its rhetoric, whereas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was not altogether uncommon to speak of European populations in terms of race (i.e. the French race, the German race, etc.). Thus the nationalistic and cultural supremacy of the text is reiterated and enhanced. Geographic "discovery" and occupation, as well as the military domination of inferior peoples is lauded as an innate and desirable quality of "Frenchness," divinely ordained through predestination. The use of the adjective "prédestinée" not only excuses the horrors associated with conquest (i.e. extermination), but also lends it an air of dutiful Christian legitimacy. For due to this sanctified affectation of presumed legitimacy, (French) colonial and/or imperial conquest is not only a product of the natural intelligence, bravery, and industriousness of the French nation, but is mandated by God. In this way, as Loomba so cogently argues, the gift of Christianity, which goes hand-in-hand with colonial conquest (i.e. the *mission civilatrice*) justifies, excuses, and even entitles the conqueror to his plunder (p. 114). Bouyer's text thus delivers a clear indication that the author feels no compunction in advocating a forceful and complete expansion of imperial/colonial aggrandizement.

For all of its pretensions to conquering glory, however, one cannot fail to notice the tones of regret, nostalgia, and perhaps even frustration or disappointment in the concluding line of Bouyer's paragraph on France's foreordained destiny as a conquering nation. Upon closer

inspection, this final thought seems to negate the optimism and self-assurance expressed in the two statements that precede it. The second statement in the paragraph speaks of the “genius” of the French nation, which provides it with the vision necessary to defeat the forces that would oppose it. And yet the third and final phrase, with its conspicuous use of the negated form of the verb *savoir* suggests precisely the opposite, that the *genius* so proudly extolled is flawed. A paradox is thus established which undermines the integrity of the passage as a whole. But what is most significant about the inconsistency of this particular passage is that it foreshadows the paradoxical nature of the chronicle as a whole. As soon becomes clear to the reader of Bouyer’s *Notes*, the text is full of glaring discrepancies which often lead the reader to speculate as to the veracity of many of the claims made and thereby underscores its flawed subjectivity as a work written “dans la sphère exclusive des intérêts de la société coloniale (Bouyer, p. 38).”

As has been demonstrated in the analysis of the passage above, there is a palpable tone of colonial rivalry/jealousy which is not only apparent, but perceptibly prominent in Bouyer’s *Notes*. What is conspicuously absent in the passages previously cited, however, is any specified target of such rivalry. But, as with many other topics treated in the travel chronicle, the author’s personalized opinion on the subject manages to manifest itself rather obviously. In the first chapter of the *Notes*, the reader, retracing the *Alecton*’s route through the western Mediterranean into the Atlantic Ocean in its chronicled journey en route to French Guiana, is treated to a textual panorama of the geographical sights one might encounter, as seen from the deck of a seagoing vessel on such a voyage. Particularly striking is a unique paragraph-sentence describing what might be witnessed as one passes through the Strait of Gibraltar.

Il voit les deux mers se heurter avec de sourds murmures; il voit le Maroc et l’Espagne, et les deux continents que sépare à peine le détroit, et sa pensée planant dans d’autres

espaces, établit entre les deux rivages un abîme plus vaste: barbarie d'un côté, civilisation de l'autre; et cette civilisation qui fait crouler les institutions vermoulues, qui plus sûrement que la guerre mine et détruit les conquêtes fondées sur l'injustice, lui apparaît comme le bélier vainqueur qui renversera quelque jour l'orgueilleux édifice que l'Angleterre croit établir sur d'impérissables assises (p. 12).

In reading this particular passage, one is struck almost immediately by the violent imagery deployed throughout. The passage, which is, in fact, one long, and rather syntactically complex sentence, is permeated by such violent imagery, which we experience immediately upon reading of the two seas, which *se heurte[nt]* as if the seas themselves are in confrontation or even at war with one another. The seas, depicted here as all-powerful, are indeed presented as a force of impressive proportions, perhaps reducing or humbling those nations and cultures which are mentioned in the passage. But the seas also seem to hold secrets, as expressed by the contradictory image evoked initially by the crashing waters, which produce the paradoxical *sourds murmures*. Cryptically, any secrets held by the seas are left unrevealed. Here again the reader witnesses the substantial respect repeatedly expressed by the author for the sea throughout the *Première partie* of the *Notes*. And yet the violent action of the seas additionally underscores the clash of nations, cultures, and institutions presented just a bit further on within the same paragraph-sentence. There is also a very definite impression of binary oppositions at work, which inflects the passage with a palpable Manichean quality, reflecting at yet another level, the extent to which the chronicle represents 19<sup>th</sup> century (French) colonial ideology in a most traditional manner.

Our current passage demonstrates the use of more figurative language than is used in other passages that we have closely examined thus far, yet the increased use of figurative

language here in no way detracts from the observation of the passage as prototypically representative of colonial discourse in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps most salient is the opposition of cultures highlighted in the use of the phrase “*barbarie d’un côté, civilisation de l’autre*,” clearly indicating ‘*barbarie*’ on the Moroccan side of the Mediterranean, while depicting Spain/Europe as a representative of ‘*civilisation*.’ On a more subtle level, the passage here presents the juxtaposition of European enlightenment against African “savagery.” The 21<sup>st</sup> century scholar might quickly point out the large cultural diversity found throughout the African continent, as well as the obvious divide between Saharan and sub-Saharan societies and cultures, but as has already been effectively established, cultural and societal nuances amongst that which is not in alliance with Capitaine Bouyer’s social, cultural, ethnic, and national standing appear to be of low textual priority.

For all of its poetic notions regarding the power and mystique of the sea, as well as its reductive division between enlightenment and barbarity, the reader is equally struck by the attention drawn to the prime champion of unfairness here depicted – the British. We see England (the term here reducing the totality of the British Empire to the dominant kingdom therein) as the primary perpetrator of “les conquêtes fondées sur l’injustice (p. 12).” British and French colonial rivalry is, in this extract, as throughout Bouyer’s *Notes* ambivalently and somewhat ambiguously maintained. More readily discernable is the express desire to see prideful England aggressively, even violently, displaced from Gibraltar through the destructive force of the *bélier vainqueur* which, in the author’s view, will justifiably right this historical wrong. “England,” hubristically perched atop its “orgueilleux édifice,” is envisioned as due to reap the whirlwind of justice in response to her infested, corrupt, and, at least in the author’s expressed opinion, unjustified ascension to imperial dominance. Clearly, Bouyer takes exception

to British imperial aspirations. Less clear, however, is his assessment of “cette civilisation qui fait croûler [sic] les institutions vermoulues,” as the reader is left to guess which *civilisation* and which *institutions vermoulues* the text specifies. Nevertheless, a discernable Anglophobia is manifest not only here, but at other strategic points found in Bouyer’s *Notes*, primarily in Chapter 7, where Bouyer’s description of British Guyana reiterates the colonial rivalry and jealousy seen here.

Clues as to the origins of the bitter Anglophobia that the reader encounters in *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d’un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863* can be found in the opening paragraph of Chapter II. Having passed through the Strait of Gibraltar, the reader travels along with the *Alecton* near the site of the Battle of Trafalgar, where the British defeated the combined fleets of the French and Spanish Navies some 56 years prior to the *Alecton*’s chronicled journey. A painful nostalgia colors the text’s description:

Il est impossible de ne pas se sentir le cœur oppressé par de tristes souvenirs, lorsque, remontant de Gibraltar à Cadix, on passe devant le cap Trafalgar. C’est là que s’est dénoué, il y a près de soixante ans, un des plus sanglants drames de la mer. Sans récriminer sur le passé, sans chercher à y raviver les haines pour l’avenir, sans rechercher les fautes de cette journée fatale pour la marine française, nous, les fils et les neveux de ces héroïques vaincus, signons-nous pieusement en passant sur leur tombe! (p. 17).

We see here a highly illuminating passage in that the audience is presented with evocative prose that specifically encapsulates the author’s more poignant reflections upon war, heroism, (naval) history, and the specific colonial rivalry at issue. The imagery gives a nod to epic poetry, with its melodramatic evocation of *sanglants drames* and *héroïques vaincus*, and it becomes easy to envisage the 19<sup>th</sup> century Métropolitain reader once again drawn into reflections of sorrowful

nationalistic longing and motivated to impassioned desire for revenge. Conspicuously absent is any explicit mention of the “England” we witness in the preceding passage, as if the mere name of France’s imperial adversary were too painful or too unpalatable to enunciate. The legacy of defeat evoked in the citation reflects a tenacious memory, despite the claim “Sans récriminer sur le passé.” And it also echoes a perpetual hate for the unnamed object of loathing regardless of the assertion “sans chercher à raviver les haines pour l’avenir.” An obstinate, yet paradoxical refusal to “forgive and forget” demonstrates a fixed and linear ideology, analogous to so many other texts of the era predicated upon and reflective of rival colonial/imperial discourses in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

For the pure and simple, and otherwise (chrono-) logical reason that Bouyer’s *Notes* was intended as a travel chronicle, with a lineally-ordered framework, we do not encounter the first detailed depictions or observations regarding race (white vs. black) until near the end of the *Première partie* as the *Alecton* conducts a port call on the Île Saint-Vincent in the Cape Verde Islands, the last port of call before the ship’s transatlantic crossing and arrival in French Guiana. Following a paragraph which briefly describes the dilapidated church and the congregation “qui fait peu d’honneur à la piété des habitants de l’île,” the subsequent observations are recorded:

Le curé, vêtu de noir, était noir de visage; l’enfant de chœur était noir. Un petit noir avait fait de son dos un lutrin sur lequel des chantres noirs psalmodiaient des notes noires, et qu’un artiste noir accompagnait sur une guitare au manche d’ébène. Que de noir ! Ce spectacle nous en mit jusqu’en l’âme. Tous ces gens me semblaient plutôt faits pour représenter le diable que le bon Dieu, que mon ridicule préjugé d’homme blanc s’obstine à matérialiser sous la belle et majestueuse figure d’un vieillard à tête blanche. Quant à ces frons-frons de guitare accompagnant des chants d’église, on ne se figure pas l’effet



étrange qu'une semblable musique peut produire sur l'esprit et sur le système nerveux (p. 34).

It is perhaps no mere coincidence that the text of the *Notes* presents its initial description of the black race against a backdrop of Christian ritual ceremony. For centuries, racial denigration of black peoples predicated itself upon the unsubstantiated Biblical precept of the black race being the descendants of Noah's son, Ham. Additionally, as has been well documented, Christian evangelism played a significant role in the justification of European colonialism since Columbus' first day in the Americas (Columbus, p. 56). As a text which serves the period's colonial agenda so faithfully and completely, the convictions conveyed in the passage cited above also express a selfsame, standardized view of race in relationship to Christianity that had been abundantly documented at the time (but which was gradually being replaced by 'scientific' arguments). In this respect, the passage here adds nothing particularly new or unique to the colonial discourse of the period. What it does do, however, is reiterate the author's conformist view of race, or "blackness," vis-à-vis Christianity and more fully validates the already firmly established assertion of Bouyer's chronicle as a virtual ambassador of colonial discourse.

The text of the passage cited above draws its own attention to that aspect which the author apparently finds so disturbing: *blackness*. Here, we need hardly elaborate on the European association of black with filthiness and sin, as this has been well established in innumerable works already written on the subject. This association, as Loomba and others have abundantly demonstrated, illustrates the binary thinking of European colonialists, reflecting the colonialists' own image of himself as "pure" and "clean" (p. 71). But, it should be noted, the binary association of, simply put, *black = bad*, *white = good*, reflects an already dated ideology at the time of the publication of Bouyer's *Notes*. Such associations were a reflection of

Renaissance notions of beauty and goodness, stemming from medieval diseases and applied to early colonial discourses as they pertained to race or racial theory (Loomba, p. 71). In this regard, the assessment expressed in the passage above reflects not so much the racial theories ostensibly founded on biological bases prevalent in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it does a more archaic ideology that appears to have, at least in the view of some colonial proponents, had a hard time in dying out as reflected in the repeated insistence of the term *noir* in Bouyer's paragraph.

More disturbing, perhaps, than the eight times the term *noir* and its variations are repeated, is the author's undisguised association of the black individuals he is describing to the mythology of the Christian devil. At this point, Bouyer curiously admits to his *ridicule préjugé*, but offers no subsequent solution to the confessed discrimination. Instead, he continues, in the concluding sentence of the passage, to imply that the music produced in the church by the black choristers and the blackened musical instrument has a deleterious affect "*sur l'esprit et sur le système nerveux*." The reader is left largely with the distinct impression that the experience described has met with the author's incisive disapproval, particularly considering the opening sentence of the paragraph which immediately follows: "*Je doute fort qu'un chrétien chancelant fortifie sa foi, ou qu'un mécréant se convertisse dans l'église de Saint-Vincent* (p. 34)." The experience depicted reflects a stunned and frightened bewilderment, and one would not be surprised if it were revealed that the author did not find the congregation of the church at Saint-Vincent to be worthy of the Christian religion. Indeed, as we have seen, they appear to the author more exemplary of sin than of salvation. This is a frightening concept perhaps even more extreme than the ideology of Arthur de Gobineau, widely regarded as the father of modern racism, who, all other considerations aside, confessed "I [have not] the least difficulty in

admitting that all human races are gifted with an equal capacity for being received into the bosom of Christian Communion (Gobineau, p. 63).” Thus, it can be argued that, in terms of racial interpretation, Bouyer’s *Notes*, albeit possibly to a level of extremity, is significantly influenced by religious factors, even going so far as to repudiate more commonly held conservative and traditional colonialist ideals of assimilation and the ‘mission civilatrice.’ Nonetheless, as shown in the passage depicting Sunday Mass at the church in Saint-Vincent, there is a palpably racist bias in Bouyer’s *Notes*. It is a bias that is found copiously and consistently throughout the chronicle and one that must be acknowledged as we delve deeper into our analysis of Bouyer’s depiction of the D’Chimbo figure and saga.

If Bouyer’s text seems harsh vis-à-vis its treatment of any nation, culture, or race other than the French, its treatment of those considered representative of a lower social class amongst the French people themselves is no less severe. It is important not to forget, however, that Bouyer’s derisive attitude toward his own men is not a condition unique to the Aleçon’s captain. Since systematized military history began, enlisted personnel, or the equivalent thereof, have been looked upon with condescension and mistrust by their military and civilian leaders. In modern terms, cadets from the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, from West Point, and other military academies around the world are indoctrinated to look upon those serving under their “leadership” with a fair amount suspicion, to be treated as overgrown children in constant need of guidance and supervision. While the degree of disdain with which officers eventually behave toward their charges varies according to each officer, few who have served in an organized military structure can deny the palpable social distinctions inherent to such a system. In Bouyer’s era, this was no less the case, and in all probability, much more prevalent and pronounced.

In the following revealing passage, the text exposes the *Alecton* captain's prejudice toward his (enlisted) crewmen, which can also be seen as a commentary on class distinctions within one's own ethnic group or nationality.

Le 4 décembre, nous passons le tropique, dont la fête se célèbre suivant les rites et coutumes que la tradition a consacrés. C'était la première fois que l'*Alecton* franchissait la frontière du royaume des Trois-Piques, ainsi que le nomment les matelots, avec ce profond mépris de la langue française qui les caractérise. Je dus racheter par une forte amende la tête du navire que menaçait la hache des percepteurs des revenus du prince. Il est avec toutes les puissances célestes des accommodements (p. 28).

In this extract, the *Alecton*'s "crossing the line" ceremony is described. This ancient maritime ritual, which is believed to have originally "been passed from the Vikings, to the Anglos, to the Saxons, and finally to the Normans" is performed when a naval vessel crosses the equator (Holland, p. 324). Here, as Bouyer explains that this particular incident marked the first time the *Alecton* observed the ritual, he criticizes the enlisted sailors' misuse of the French language. Describing the sailors' vernacular as *ce profond mépris de la langue française*, the text presumes linguistic ascendancy on the part of the author. Though there is a veritable element of truth to the old axiom "to curse like a sailor," here it is insinuated that the sailors' linguistic inaptitude, with the potent nominal description of *mépris*, is intentional and malicious. The weight of the linguistic accusation is intensified by the preceding adjective *profond*, which injects a further element of intentional cultural disregard on the part of the crewmen and underscores the implied class distinction(s) being presented at this point in the text.

An interesting observation, however, and one that serves to undermine the authenticity of linguistic superiority appears two paragraphs later, "De grands enfants que ces marins qui jouent

tous les jours avec la mort et que la moindre drôlerie jette en des accès de fou rire (p. 28).” Having, in effect, itself expressed a *profond mépris* for the crew of the *Alecton* in what is an accusation of their “butchering” the French language, the text here uses the more colloquial term *marins* rather than the more official title of *matelot*, to all intents and purposes committing a similar linguistic offense to that accused of them. Furthermore, one is left to wonder just how it is that referring to the equator as “*la frontière du royaume des Trois-Piques*” (a fairly clever pun, if not a consummately charming one) represents a severe disdain for the French language. In this manner, the section regarding the crewmembers of the *Alecton*, as it is particularly worded, gives the reader more of a sense of contempt for the crew than it does a compelling argument for their transgressions against the French language per se. In addition, the direct referral to the *marins* as *grands enfants*, highly amused by *la moindre drôlerie* adds weight to the reader’s impression that Bouyer has something less than immense respect for the men of his charge.

In sum, the passages that we have explored in the “Première partie” of Bouyer’s *La Guyane française, notes et souvenirs d’un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863* establish contextual patterns which will be useful in our analysis of Chapter IV, “Le brigand D’Chimbo dit le Rongou: ses crimes son arrestation, sa mort.” We have seen that the text reflects writing very typical and supportive of (French) colonial discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, unapologetic, chauvinistic, and forceful in its claims. In looking at Bouyer’s initial commentary regarding national, racial, and class/social observations and distinctions, we can come to the conclusion that the text upon which we are currently focused reflects an ideology which has little regard for those different from author’s own self-professed distinctions (“breton, catholique, apostolique, et romain”), and epitomizes everything that the ideal colonial officer *should* be. One must keep this brief self-description in mind as the focus of the current chapter of our study now proceeds

to an examination of Bouyer's depiction of the D'Chimbo Affair and a scrutiny of the legacy that this depiction has left to the residents of French Guiana and to those who have appropriated D'Chimbo's legacy itself as one of national spirit and/or resistance.

### **Frédéric Bouyer: Ambassador of Colonial Discourse?**

In the illuminating treatise, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, author Ania Loomba concisely sums up the restructuring of human learning brought about by colonial institutions:

Colonialism reshaped existing structures of human knowledge. No branch of learning was left untouched by the colonial experience. The process was somewhat like the functioning of ideology itself, simultaneously a misrepresentation of reality and its reordering (p. 57).

Accepting Loomba's citation as a valid assessment of colonialism's distortion of reality, both in the present as well as in the past, one is left to question why certain texts written within a colonial context were considered or are still considered seminal works pertaining to studies of regions colonized by European nations, if not actually "official" interpretations of the aforementioned colonial experience. As concerns the historic and scientific representation of French Guiana, this certainly proves true of Bouyer's travel chronicle. In their anthology of French Guianese literature, Biringanine Ndagano and Monique Blérald-NDagano suggest that Bouyer's text distinguishes itself from other narrative descriptions of travel to and within the colony, despite the author's evident subjective commentary, in "la portée réelle (historique) des faits observés (p. 61). To be sure, as will be explored at length in the next chapter, Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, originally published in 1972, appears to be the first significant written fictional text to question the validity of Bouyer's award-winning travel chronicle (the city

of Paris awarded Bouyer the “Prix de la Caisse des Écoles du XIII<sup>e</sup> Arrondissement,” presumably for the book’s contribution to the education of students in the 13<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement). To this day, as we have seen earlier, Bouyer’s text, embodying a vernacular similar to Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines*, remains a somewhat, even if minimal, influential source of literary authority, also appearing on such websites as that of the Académie de la Guyane and Blada.com (website for Kourou’s newspaper “Le Marron”), as epigraph and reference point to the online digital representations of the territory. Reference to Bouyer’s text surfaces in brief form in many of the historical and scientific studies conducted in and on French Guiana, from Mam Lam Fouck’s *Histoire générale de la Guyane française* to Montabo’s *L’Histoire de la Guyane* and Redfield’s *Space in the Tropics*, etc. Thus, the text, despite, or perhaps because of its flagrantly colonial ideology, has indeed, in a Foucauldian sense, contributed to the overall structural knowledge of French Guiana in a manner similar to the one described by Loomba. This must be borne in mind as we explore Bouyer’s influence in subsequent chapters.

Having made use of the first of the two parts of his chronicle to establish his literary, intellectual, and colonial authority, Bouyer proceeds to the second part of his work in which he depicts the geographical, cultural, and institutional composition of the colony. The opening of this *Deuxième partie* is begun by relating tales regarding the origins of the mythical land of El Dorado, and its relevance to initial European interest in the region. From there, the text progresses to the more significant descriptions of the chronicle, detailing the physical environment (the jungle, plantations, waterways, etc.), specified places visited (Cayenne, Kourou, the Îles du Salut, the neighboring European colonies, etc.), peoples comprising the colony’s populace (Native Americans, immigrants, convicts, maroons, etc.), and the institutions

(penal colonies, agricultural interests, etc.) found in French Guiana in 1862-1863. This *Deuxième partie* of Bouyer's *Notes* consists of 12 chapters which allow the author to demonstrate a rather prototypical 19<sup>th</sup>-century European interest in subjects as diverse as medicine, law, anthropology, poetry, etc. And in spite of earlier pretensions as an objective observer, Bouyer's text contains amply opinionated commentary on virtually every person, place, thing, or subject which he describes in language that emphatically underscores his relationship to and authority within the imperial structural hierarchy.

### **The D'Chimbo Affair: Bouyer's Representation and Interpretation**

Perhaps nowhere within Bouyer's *Notes* is the text more idiosyncratic than in the fourth chapter of the *Deuxième partie*. This chapter, entitled 'Le Brigand D'Chimbo, dit le Rongou – ses crimes, son arrestation, sa mort,' is central to the examination of cultural expression in French Guiana as it is the foundation upon which Patient and subsequently Stéphenon build their texts. The chapter also manifests, perhaps more significantly than any other part of the entire chronicle, disturbingly blatant racist language and imagery which of course reflects colonialist ideology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – an ideology which is responsible for Bouyer's own position of authority. Bouyer's rendition of the D'Chimbo Affair was apparently a significant element in the cultural evolution of French Guiana's storytellers – in particular those descended from the African Diaspora – throughout the subsequent century, as witnessed by the fictional reactions of Serge Patient and Elie Stéphenon. However, it is at this point important to piece together a synopsis of the historical actualities of the affair, to the extent possible, given the limited number of resources available.



According to historian Mam Lam Fouck, the abolition of slavery in French Guiana significantly changed the makeup of everyday life in the colony, in particular for the former slaves themselves (Mam Lam Fouck, *D'Chimbo: du criminel au héros*, p. 19). The former plantation slaves, “no longer required to slave away under the threat of the whip,” entered into an era of relative calm, in which “even the nature of criminality changed (p. 19).” But for those institutions previously dependent on slave labor in France’s American colonies, labor shortages became a significant problem. In his economic history of the Caribbean, the former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Eric Williams explains that such labor shortages were replaced with three principal “sources of supply” of white labor (p. 96): 1) “the indentured [white] servant, the *engagé*, as he was called in France” (p. 96); 2) “convicts and malefactors” (p. 99); 3) and religious nonconformists (pp. 100-101). Apparently, however, this supply of white labor did not meet the needs of the worker requirements. In another historical treatise, *La Guyane française au temps de l’esclavage, de l’or et de la francisation (1802-1946)*, Mam Lam Fouck explains that French Guiana had turned to Indian and African “immigration” in order to alleviate the need for manual labor (p. 222). Mam Lam Fouck cites reservations regarding the suspect nature of so-called “African immigration”:

Mais les milieux abolitionnistes européens, et plus particulièrement ceux de l’Angleterre, considéraient avec beaucoup de suspicion l’organisation de cette nouvelle migration d’Africains vers les anciennes colonies esclavagistes, à un moment où l’esclavage existait encore aussi bien en Afrique qu’en Amérique (p. 222).

As introduced in the preceding chapter of this study, one can seriously doubt the enthusiasm of many African “immigrants” in finding themselves under such circumstances in French Guiana, which is even further elucidated by Mam Lam Fouck. The historian notes that recruiting agents

more often than not purchased captives from their African owners, who would then be granted their freedom pending completion of their working contracts (p. 224). Citing the elevated numbers of escaped indentured African “immigrants,” as well as their heavy reluctance to renew their contracts as evidence, Mam Lam Fouck elucidates the forced nature of such labor, adding that many of the escapees were subsequently obligated to scratch out a precarious existence through pillage, while others sought refuge with their emancipated brethren (p. 224). This system of de facto slavery is also explained on page 116 in the space of five paragraphs in Bouyer’s *Notes*. Of note in Bouyer’s depiction of “engagement” in French Guiana is the conflicted tone of sarcasm in the text, suggesting, perhaps, a paradoxically ambivalent callousness toward those otherwise concerned with the plight of the African immigrant. The first paragraph of Bouyer’s depiction explains the source of “recruitment”:

Sous l’égide de la légalité, on organisa un recrutement, grâce auquel les roitelets de la Nigritie orientale et occidentale nous faisaient cession de leur excédant de sujets sous le titre d’engagés volontaires. Ces enrôlés devaient être rapatriés au bout de sept ans, s’ils en exprimaient le désir, et devaient rapporter au pays natal la moisson de vertus glanées aux champs de la civilisation (p. 116).

Perhaps the most significant feature of the beginning paragraph of Bouyer’s depiction, aside from the use of the derogatory term “la Nigritie,” which echoes the *Première partie*’s treatment of Africa and its populations as culturally and racially inferior, is the use of terminology evoking images of military recruitment, and other military terminology. The use of such nominative terminology as “égide,” “recrutement,” and “engagés” clearly borrows from the language of the armed forces when describing this particular source of labor, underscoring the implied military involvement in the enterprise. Furthermore, the absence of any terminology referring to the

subjects of “recrutement” as human in any capacity emphasizes once again the author’s propensity for distinguishing class and racial divisions. One recognizes the possibility that a similar representation of Bouyer’s own enlisted crewmen would be depicted in a similar manner. For such absence of humanity justifies any maltreatment, reducing such workers to mere products of labor. As Memmi argues,

What is left of the colonized at the end of this stubborn effort to dehumanize him? He is surely no longer an alter ego of the colonizer. He is hardly a human being. He tends rapidly toward becoming an object. As an end, in the colonizer’s supreme ambition, he should exist only as a function of the needs of the colonizer, i.e., be transformed into a pure colonized (p. 86).

Bouyer’s text, in this regard, serves as a near perfect ambassador of the ideology to which Memmi’s assertion is made.

Consistent with the theme of labor in the paragraph’s text, is the image of agricultural exploitation evoked at the end of the second line, “la moisson,” “vertus glanées,” and “champs.” The fact that those “recruits” to whom the text refers are designated to return to their homelands with the superiority of virtue gained from their experience amongst the “civilized” once again emphasizes cultural, and in this particular instance, agricultural superiority, demonstrating the classical Euro-colonial belief in its superiority in virtually all aspects of human society.

There exists a conspicuous absence in the paragraph being analyzed of any reference to the actual, completely “voluntary” nature of the “recruits” in correlation of Mam Lam Fouck’s assertion that the importation of “immigration” in the sense conveyed in this context was something less than volitional. Paradoxically, however, Bouyer does mention the “excédant de sujets,” yet neglects to mention that the majority, if not all of the “sujets” were in effect captive

slaves. How, in fact, can the reader interpret the absence of this particular detail? Does Bouyer's paragraph reflect a certain colonial propaganda? Does it reveal an ignorance of the fact? Or perhaps it is indicative of the unimportance of the fact to the author? One suspects the latter, particularly with regard to the twelfth and last chapter of Bouyer's *Notes*, entitled "Populations noires du Haut Maroni et de la Guyane hollandaise; le Grand-Man Adam," in which the author's transparent level of unapologetic racism culminates in an expression of scorn at the idea of now providing former slaves with a salary, a defense of slavery, and justification for use of the whip "pour stimuler une paresse innée chez les Africains;" all of which is summarized by interjecting the phrase "Dictio testimonii non est servo homini," which he translates as "Un esclave ne peut déposer en justice (pp. 306-307)."

In contrast to the one cited above, Bouyer's subsequent paragraph does proffer a de-emphasized admission of the dubious nature of the "recruitment" in question, but also excuses the "abusive" nature therein:

L'arbitraire présidait bien quelquefois à ces embarquements. Le monarque, peu contrôlée dans son despotisme, ne demandait pas toujours l'agrément des gens avant de leur faire faire un voyage de long cours ; mais dans quelle entreprise humaine ne se glisse-t-il pas quelques abus (p. 116)

Thus, the reader finds in this paragraph another paradox in the insidious nature of the "immigration" being described versus the justification of it. One senses the ambivalence associated with the explanation of this specific importation of labor through the previous acknowledgment of the need for it in support of the colonial enterprise, and conversely, the opportunity to comment upon its sources in a manner that once again reflects the author's contempt for those upon whom this particular "entreprise humaine" is dependent. This particular

passage, perhaps more than any other that we have examined thus far, demonstrates the sarcastic element of Bouyer's text by virtue of its scornful portrayal of the hypothetical African authority responsible for supplying the much-needed manual labor. In the depiction of the *monarque*, we find him both unruly and despotic. The textual choice of the nominative "arbitraire" in the preceding sentence underscores his unrestrained nature, thereby illustrating the author's pervasive insinuation that any and all Africans, in spite of rank, exhibit analogous, deficient qualities of character.

Bouyer's description of the D'Chimbo Affair finds itself in the shadow of this context of undisguised contempt for the black populations of Africa and French Guiana. It should, at this point, appear obvious to the reader that the particular portrayal of any person of African origin or descent will meet with the contempt exemplified in the relevant passages that have thus far been explored. And this certainly proves true in Bouyer's portrayal of D'Chimbo in the fourth chapter of *La Guyane française, notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863*. From the beginning of the chapter, descriptive elements of D'Chimbo's representation are permeated with derogatory nouns and adjectives. Within the first two paragraphs of the chapter, the reader encounters the terms "bandit" and "misérable," and later, as previewed in the introduction to the current study, *scélérat, farouche émigrant, le terrible Rongou, bête de Gévaudan, bandit, criminel, taureau, monstre, malfaiteur, sauvage, bête fauve, misérable, enfant, animal féroce, fléau, ogre altéré de sang, démon, and égorgeur*. Thus, the vocabulary employed by Bouyer to depict his alleged criminal subject reflects monstrous imagery doubtlessly intended to enhance the darkly evil nature of the individual under scrutiny, which recalls the chronicle's first chapter, and the description of the omnipresent blackness encountered in the African church. One notes also the demonic nature of many of the descriptions, which is not only consistent with traditional

associations of French Guiana with the Christian concept of Hell, but also with what appears to be the author's deep-seated fear and/or revulsion of all things black (which, as we have seen in the passage cited above, he equates with filth and ugliness) and African. However, the insidious portrait of D'Chimbo in Chapter IV does not confine itself to textual interpretations. On page 124, the reader encounters the reproduction of a visual sketch entitled "Le Rongou guettant Julienne," in which the graphic illustration replicates succinctly the narrative depiction of D'Chimbo (See figure 1. below).



Figure 1. Le Rongou guettant Julienne

In the very title of the sketch, the audience once again notes the author's hesitancy or refusal to refer to his subject either by his name, or in another manner which might acknowledge his humanity. Instead, as the textual evidence has demonstrated, Bouyer's revulsion towards Africans permits him the use of the ethnic adjective "Rongou," without apparent hesitation, as if the idea that the source of such a repulsive chain of events being a "savage" African, i.e. Rongou, were hardly less than surprising. Additionally, in a generic sense, using D'Chimbo's given name would signify, at some unspecified level, a tangible recognition on the part of the text, and as evidenced by its treatment of Africans and their descendants in a general sense, this is decidedly *not* a circumstance that the reader is likely to encounter. Nor does s/he.

In the graphic reproduction presented above, sketched by the renowned Breton illustrator of many of Jules Verne's novels, Édouard Riou, D'Chimbo's physical attributes are caricatured to the point of absurdity, and convey the idea of a bush-Negro-turned- "animal" preparing to ambush the unsuspecting, innocently depicted *mulâtresse*, Julienne. Here we see visually the 'bête de Gévaudan,' 'taureau,' sauvage,' 'bête fauve,' 'animal féroce,' 'démon,' and 'égorgueur' found textually throughout the chapter. The viewer's thoughts turn immediately to the image of a panther or some other physically powerful jungle beast ready to pounce on its unsuspecting prey, and one can easily visualize the intentional and evil carnage which must surely ensue. Of particular note are the exaggerated, protruding facial features of the chronicle's antagonist, the misplaced cheekbones, the powerfully set jaw line, and the oversized lips, all of which radiate a stereotypical colonial visual image of grotesqueness and savagery, which augments the imminent danger that one senses. Surrounding darkness intensifies the monstrousness of the illustratively depicted D'Chimbo, which is juxtaposed against the light radiating around the lighter-skinned Julienne, and the reader is once again presented with the proposition of whiteness and light

relating innocence and goodness, while everything dark and black bespeaks evil, loss, destruction and violence. Given such an orthodox view of colonial assumptions as offered by the depiction of the African “immigrant” D’Chimbo, the reader is consequently less shocked to encounter later on in the text, in the final chapter, a portion of which has already been discussed, the author’s justification for the use of violent means in the repression of the “covetous” and “lazy” African/slave. Here, as ubiquitously throughout the text of Bouyer’s chronicle, the reader witnesses a palpable, verbalized disdain for the African/black man, despite linguistic evidence implicating ambivalences to the contrary. It is of little wonder, consequently, that violence and forcefulness find expression in the D’Chimbo texts of Patient and Stéphenson in response to the same legacy engendered here by Bouyer’s representation of a relatively important, or at least culturally significant, event in French Guiana’s past.

In the interests of cohesiveness, it is perhaps prudent at this point to summarize the content of Chapitre IV of the *Notes*, which begins with a brief description of the scene of D’Chimbo’s execution, in which the reader immediately encounters a stereotyping, or essentialization of Cayenne’s inhabitants: “Le 8 janvier, 1862, un mouvement inusité agita toute la ville de Cayenne. Il n’était que six heures du matin, et la population, si paresseuse d’habitude, encombra la place du Marché (p. 115).” In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Memmi poses the question, “Besides having to define a point of reference, a norm, varying from one people to another, can one accuse an entire people of laziness (pp. 80-81)?” Apparently, in this case, one can, and essentially does. Hence, the reader witnesses yet one more example of Bouyer’s capacity for dogmatically echoing standardized colonial discourse.

After attempting to whet the reader’s appetite with the promise of a bloody spectacle based upon ‘enlightened’ French jurisprudence, the text proceeds to set the context for the



D'Chimbo Affair which will be related. Reference is made to the need to replace slave labor after emancipation in the colony, and the resulting methods of "recruitment" are described, portions of which have been seen and analyzed earlier. It is explained to the reader that it was under these conditions that the chapter's protagonist, here referred to as "le scélérat," found himself to be "employed" at the Approuague gold mining concern (Bouyer, p. 116). One brief paragraph, or three sentences thereof, delineates the time from D'Chimbo's arrival in the colony to his arrest, trial, and conviction. Conspicuously absent from the passage is the context in which D'Chimbo's first alleged crime took place; apparently some petty offence, according to Mam Lam Fouck, but one which landed him a three-month jail sentence in Cayenne nonetheless (*D'Chimbo: du criminel au héros*, p. 22). In the fourth chapter of the current study, we shall see how Stéphenon's text provides a context for this initial, never verified, transgression in the playwright's challenge to the colonial record of his homeland's folkloric past.

From this point, the text explains the resulting "reign of terror" for which D'Chimbo was accused, apprehended, tried, convicted, and eventually beheaded. Bouyer's narrative description of each of the crimes he is alleged to have committed roughly parallel that of the court record, but not without a considerable amount of commentary and conjecture, which enhances the description of an uncontrolled animal-like barbarian. Mam Lam Fouck explains,

Les textes contemporains de D'Chimbo l'ont purement et simplement assimilé à une bête sauvage. Pour Bouyer (1867 : 120-121), D'Chimbo a une physionomie d'une « férocité inouïe », il ajoute qu'il « ressemble au djina [sic], à ce gorille colossal dont il est le compatriote, et dont il a en partage la force redoutable et les appétits sensuels », c'est une « sorte de bête de Gévaudan, une espèce de taureau ». Plus d'un demi-siècle après, le Chanoine Vaudon (1927 : 427) en a la même représentation qui voit en D'Chimbo une

« bête féroce », un « monstre » dont les victimes peuvent percevoir « l'odeur sauvage »  
(*D'Chimbo: du criminel au héros*, p. 23)

Thus, it is apparent that Bouyer's chapter represents not only one of the first textual records of the D'Chimbo saga (if not in fact *the* very first), but also manifestly an extensive and lasting one, as evidenced by the citation above, which implies a direct influence on Vaudon's account. In Bouyer's text, we see the "criminel" element of the Mam Lam Fouck title "D'Chimbo: du criminel au héros." We shall revisit the "héros" element of that title in Chapters 3 and 4 in the exploration of Patient's and Stéphenson's texts as we not only analyze their writings as response to Bouyer's chronicle highlighted here, but examine further the evolution of the historical personage depicted here so derogatorily into one of figurative social and cultural dignity and resilience.

## Summary

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to demonstrate effectively the reality of Bouyer's chronicle as an orthodox *colonial* representation of a routine naval mission in support of colonial institutions in French Guiana in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have seen examples of the author's attitudes towards and opinions of a number of topics related to colonial endeavors, institutions, and individuals, despite repeated claims of impartiality and the simple relating of facts and observations. In so doing, it has become clear that the text can, in fact, be considered a prototypically colonial one, especially with regard to the language used by the author. One can find similarities between this nonfictional travel journal and other, fictional and nonfictional texts of the era. By way of example, Pierre Loti's *Le Roman d'un spahi*, and H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* both contain descriptions of native Africans remarkably

similar to that found in Bouyer's *Notes*. And as has been demonstrated, parallels can be found with the chronicle explored in this chapter, and the texts of Gobineau and Letourneau, all of which, it would be difficult to contest, represent textual, literary support of the European (Anglo, and particularly French) colonizing mission and infrastructure. In maintaining a sustained level of thinly disguised or even blatant level of racist discourse, each of the texts manages to dehumanize the colonized subjects encountered and/or described, thereby justifying the actions of colonial authorities, through means, violent or otherwise, in the pursuit of national or personal economic interests. For, as Sartre has argued, "the idea of privilege is at the heart of the colonial relationship – and that privilege is undoubtedly economic (p. xii)."

As our focus now turns to an exploration of Patient's and Stéphenson's texts, having effectuated an analysis of Bouyer's chronicle in the present chapter, we can perhaps better understand the perceived need to respond to a text which has left an indelible mark, though in some respects a limited one, upon the historical, social, and cultural evolution of the peoples of French Guiana.

### Chapter 3: Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*: Confronting the Legacy

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, addressing the devaluation of the past on the part of the colonizing power, Fanon states,

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today (p. 210).

As this idea pertains to French Guiana, we have seen in the previous chapter that a not insignificant amount of the colony's past has been influenced by Frédéric Bouyer's travel chronicle, which, on the whole, paints a rather unflattering picture of a land and peoples that his text finds interesting, but essentially "backward," and "uncivilized." In this sense, it can be argued that Fanon's citation above can be applied directly to the Bouyer narrative as an almost textbook-type example. And, as introduced previously, it is to this sort of distortion, disfigurement, and destruction of French Guiana's past that Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur* addresses itself. Indeed, explaining why the author chose to set the narrative in 1804 as opposed to 1861-1862 in which the actual D'Chimbo Affair occurred, Ndagano, in his introduction to the 2001 re-publication of Patient's novella, states,

...le récit de Serge Patient se veut réaliste en récupérant des personnages comme celui de Victor Hugues, ou encore celui de Pompée, l'un des chefs noirs marrons qui commandait le camp de Tonnegrande et qui résista aux attaques de l'armée gouvernementale pendant plus de 22 ans (p. 10)

Thus, it is no secret that one of the primary goals of Patient's text is to make a cultural, literary attempt at the rehabilitation of the realities, personalities, and episodes of French Guiana's past in response to an historical and literary tradition that has left an otherwise harsh legacy behind, as exemplified by Bouyer's *Notes*. However, at this point, a word or two of caution is required. In his article entitled "Critical Fanonism," Henry Louis Gates Jr. discusses readings of Fanon, in particular those of Homi Bhabha and Abdul JanMohamed, with regard to the interpretations and representations of colonial histories on the part of the colonized. Gates discusses JanMohamed's criticism of Bhabha's reading of Fanon, stating, "...Abdul JanMohamed takes Bhabha to task for downplaying the negativity of the colonial encounter... (p. 462)." Expounding upon this idea, Gates argues,

The critical double bind these charges raise is clear enough. You can empower discursively the native, and open yourself to charges of downplaying the epistemic (and literal) violence of colonialism; or play up the absolute nature of colonial domination, and be open to charges of negating the subjectivity and agency of the colonized, thus textually replicating the repressive operations of colonialism. In agency, so it seems, begins responsibility (p. 462).

Implied in this assertion is the notion that colonial history can easily become distorted, or even negated, in enabling the colonized Other a political, and by association, a social and cultural voice. In other words, as Fanon has been accused of distorting history, so too might others who follow his logic too closely or too literally. For Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, the accusation could similarly be made that the reinterpretation of colonial history in French Guiana is itself a distortion of political and historical realities of the colony. Whether or not this is correct, the idea must be acknowledged as we attempt to analyze Patient's text as a political

voice of the colonized Other in the larger sense. Conversely, however, Gates cites an essay by Edward Saïd, entitled “Representing the Colonized,” in which Saïd is quoted as arguing,

Despite its bitterness and violence, the whole point of Fanon’s work is to force the European metropolis to think its history *together with* the history of colonies awakening from the cruel stupor and abused immobility of imperial dominion...

I do not think that the anti-imperialist challenge represented by Fanon and Césaire or others like them has by any means been met; neither have we taken them seriously as models or representations of human effort in the contemporary world. In fact Fanon and Césaire – of course I speak of them as types – jab directly at the question of identity and of identitarian thought, that secret sharer of present anthropological reflection on “otherness” and “difference.” What Fanon and Césaire required of their own partisans, even during the heat of struggle, was to abandon fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition (pp. 458-459).

By this definition, Patient’s novella could also be construed as a usurpation of precisely these types of “fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition,” as it attempts to question the historical, social, and cultural codification of French Guiana as relegated by “official” Métropolitain interpretations and representations of the colony and its past.

In the introduction to the latest, and one of the only, anthologies of French Guianese literature, Biringanine Ndagano and Monique Blérald-NDagano offer a definition of a national culture as one in which: 1) the number of writers and published works is significant; 2) there is a distinct historical connection between the past and the present, and 3) one in which the vitality of literary works transcend national limits (p. 13). The editors admit to having been themselves

inspired in the definition of national literature by the editors of a Congolese literature anthology, identified as R. Chemain and A. Chemain-Degrange (p. 13).

In light of this definition, does the absence of an extended corpus of French Guianese literature reflect the département's geopolitical marginalization? And what is the significance of the relative deficiency of critical works treating the history, geography, analysis of literature, and other cultural discourses in relation to the département? Is the scarcity of such discourses the reflection of a minuscule population? World Book online tells us that the estimated population of French Guiana stands currently at approximately 243,000 (Maingot). Perhaps the direct comparison between population statistics and literary production is itself a notion mired in intellectual concepts derived from the limitations of Western academics; in other words, quantitative literary production correlates directly to population. More to the point, the comparative lack of literary analysis of that French Guianese literature which has been offered to the world, and the parallel insufficiency of writing featuring French Guiana as a locus of interest are perhaps indicative of the way in which Western-based cultural critics perceive, or do not perceive, French Guiana's historical, social, and cultural roles in the world at large. This idea is also somewhat reflective of the absence of analytical treatment of Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, which confronts colonial realities in French Guiana in the (early) 19th century. The absence is relatively notable when one considers the fact that Patient's novella was awarded the Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe in 2001, even though it had originally been published in 1978. The 29-year absence of recognition of such a potentially important, albeit, some might argue artistically transparent, work is also revealing in itself. Nevertheless, it is not particularly surprising that Patient's novella has been practically ignored by Western cultural critics. As Florence Martin has suggested in the introduction to *De la Guyane à la diaspora africaine*, French Guianese

literature remains largely forgotten (p. 10). In spite of this comparative lack of cultural and historic interest, Patient's *chronique coloniale* represents a potentially important step in filling a void of writings treating French Guiana, its people and history, as a topic of interest, and attempts to provide a voice, however forgotten or ignored, to that "national" culture which has been, for centuries now, either ignored, suppressed, or marginalized.

To put it succinctly, *Le Nègre du gouverneur*'s narrative questions not only the French colonial presence in French Guiana, but also Western, and especially French perceptions of the history of French Guiana. In so doing, the novella offers a voice of resistance to Western colonial discourse through its own pursuit to re-write history and its questioning of the validity of Western values placed on the population of French Guiana through the inherently violent and unjust ideology of colonialism. In this particular text, a challenge to French/European colonial ideology is achieved through the interrogation of the key themes of violence, ambivalence, desire, and mimicry as they relate to the narrator's re-presentation of the story's central fictional character, the slave named D'Chimbo, an historical and literary figure who has been introduced in earlier chapters of the current study. An analysis of these themes will illustrate many of the concepts and questions raised by influential post-colonial theorists, from Aimé Césaire to Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi and beyond, and will consequently demonstrate Patient's novella as a conceivably active agent of ideological resistance to the historical and literary legacy of French colonialism, and to that of Frédéric Bouyer in particular. Homi Bhabha's work on the topic of ambivalence and his analysis of Fanon's writings as they pertain to that same central topic is also useful to the interrogation of the aforementioned themes, and shall be presented in a manner in which a resulting, more thorough, understanding of Patient's text ensues.



For the purposes of clarity in the analysis of Patient's novella which represents the central textual topic of the current chapter of our study, it is perhaps prudent to here summarize the storyline, and in so doing, introduce a few of the more relevant themes, characters and other important narrative elements that shall be explored in depth a little further on.

In the 2001 Ibis Rouge edition of *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, Biringanine Ndagano offers a brief introduction to Patient's novella and the short collection of poetry which is included in the current edition, following the presentation of Patient's major work. Ndagano's initiates his introduction with a citation drawn from Patient's poetry, which highlights that which is considered, amongst certain French Guianese writers and academics, as a general apathy of the département's population toward their own history and place in the world: “mon peuple qui marche à côté de ses pompes / et de ses oeuvres,” ou encore “Voyez mon peuple / il bâille à son insignifiance (p. 7).” A significant citation in the sense that Ndagano will argue a bit further on in his introduction that Patient's novella represents an important step in French Guianese artistic/literary expression which calls into question the notion of assimilation in the colony's past and present. As Ndagano argues,

*Le Nègre du gouverneur* est une traversée de l'histoire guyanaise, de l'esclavage au questionnement actuel sur l'avenir institutionnel de la Guyane, en passant évidemment par la colonisation, la départementalisation et autres errements institutionnels qui caractérisent les rapports entre la Guyane et la France (p. 9).”

While touching upon other themes to be found in Patient's narrative such as the correlation between language and power, historical recuperation, and liberation from repressive ideologies and institutions, it becomes clear that Ndagano's introduction sees assimilation as the principal driving force behind Patient's text. Unquestionably, the issue of assimilation does loom as *the*

major subject of Patient's text. However, as we shall see, a number of other themes, topics, and questions figure quite heavily in the overall textual presentation of a narrative that also seems to largely address the postcolonial idea of cultural and historical recuperation.

Following Ndagano's introduction, Patient prefaces his novella with a revealing epigraph drawn, presumably, from actual colonial archives and addressed to the Minister of the Navy and of the Colonies back in the Métropole by the governor of French Guiana, Victor Hugues. The epigraph, also cited in the introduction to this study, here merits reiteration as it is relevant to the more detailed analysis of Patient's narrative which follows.

*... «lorsque, livré à mes réflexions et méditant sur les moyens de conduire cette colonie au degré de prospérité dont elle est susceptible, je considère le peu de ressources que j'ai à attendre des hommes qui habitent la Guyane : lorsque je vois que les choses les plus faciles à exécuter se présentent hérissées de difficultés et d'obstacles, par l'effet de l'ignorance, de l'apathie et de la mauvaise volonté de la masse ; lorsque je suis si souvent réduit à la nécessité de traiter les habitants en général comme des enfants malades, envers lesquels il faut employer la contrainte pour leur faire prendre un breuvage salubre, je vous avoue, citoyen ministre, que tout courage m'abandonnerait...»*

Signé : Victor HUGUES

Au ministre de la Marine et des Colonies

Cayenne, 25 floréal an XI (p. 15)

In this citation, the reader previews a few of the traits that will manifest themselves in Patient's fictional portrayal of Hugues later on in the story. Of particular note is the expression of ambivalence found in Hugues' stated belief in the colony's potential for "prosperity," juxtaposed

against his perception of “ignorance,” “apathie,” and “mauvaise volonté” of its inhabitants. As we shall see, the condition of ambivalence, according to post-colonial theorists, is a trait shared by the colonizer, as well as the colonized, and here we see its manifestation at even the highest levels of colonial authority. Indeed, the notion of ambivalence can be considered one of the major themes of Patient’s text. And, once one has fully absorbed the message of the narrative in its entirety, the reader may, retrospectively, more fully appreciate the magnitude of its noticeable appearance in the initial textual element of the novella.

In addition to Hugues’ marked ambivalence towards his subjects, Patient’s epigraph introduces the reader to hints of the later fictionalized rendition of the governor’s propensity for the use of extreme measures. Indicating that he must employ “constraint” in forcing them to conform to his own vision of colonial “prosperity,” the observant reader understands the subtext to signify the potential use of violence as a means to achieve the goals of his charge. And indeed, Patient’s fictionalized Hugues is one whose appreciation of, if not pleasure in, the use of violence to obtain his objectives, will become apparent in the pages that follow.

Lastly, it should be noted that in the epigraph proffered by the author to his readers, a textual emphasis is placed on the term “enfants malades.” In so doing, the passage introduces the reader to a stereotyped vision of the colonized population on the part of the colony’s chief “colonizer,” thereby foreshadowing the prototypical colonizing ideology embodied by the governor, which is indeed, in many respects, true to form, as it is the fictionalized Hugues character, more so than any other found in the narrative, who represents what might be termed the “classic” personification of the most hard-core of archetypal colonial ideology.

Having prefaced the novella with an epigraph foreshadowing a few of the thematic and characteristic elements to be found in the pages that follow, Patient opens his narrative with a

segment depicting the “social scene” amongst the wives of the colonial elite. Chronologically, this scene occurs near or at the end of the linear storyline, and it is doubtlessly due to this textual strategy that the caveat “Prologue-Epilogue” is given to the scene in question. The principle “motivation” behind the interactions we encounter in this initial segment of the narrative centers upon the act of a “passionate kiss” shared between D’Chimbo and Virginie Barel, the white daughter of the colony’s chief prosecutor, as witnessed through the spyglass of the colony’s “directeur de l’Intérieure,” Vilouin. The reader finds this chapter/segment replete with instances of pettiness, jealousy, and rivalry amongst not only the wives of the colonial elite, but amongst their husbands, the colonial officials themselves. While such personality quirks are not in and of themselves explicitly critical of colonialism as a whole, they do imply something about the lives, motivations, and beliefs of those associated with colonial power. One illuminating example, accentuated by the gossip of two bored ladies of leisure discussing the now infamous kiss between a black slave and the white daughter of a colonial cabinet minister implicates a culture of insidious scheming and networking, designed to, concurrently, entertain and mock, presumably with the intent of, absurdly, augmenting the social status of one family over another:

Et telles deux araignées tissant la même toile, dame Vilouin et dame Talandier partirent, chacune de son côté, sécréter dans la ville leur soie venimeuse. Avant la tombée de la nuit, tout le quartier résidentiel se trouvait enserré dans les mailles du réseau. Les voisines s’interpellaient de cour à jardin, comme des commères de bas étage, se transmettaient la nouvelle par-dessus les clôtures en fleurs, et la rumeur traversait les rues, faisait le tour de la place d’Ebène, filait vers la place d’Armes où, personne n’osant la porter jusqu’au palais du gouverneur, elle menaçait à chaque fois de mourir comme une vague à bout de course... (p. 21)

Perhaps the most striking element in this particular paragraph can be found in the imagery associated with a (female) spider and her web, trapping unsuspecting victims in an inescapable net of deleterious invective. While not an imagery that can be exclusively attributed to the social network of wives of the colonial elite, the scene does implicate a certain culture of insidiousness that can be found amongst those with too much time and privilege on their hands. In this regard, we can consider this particular allusion as a textual commentary on the characteristic nature of the feminine component of the colonial elite. In short, the message conveyed is one of stagnation, insidiousness, corruption, and decay, and in this sense, one that criticizes, or at least calls into question, the attitudes and actions of those even conjugally associated with colonial power.

If the behavior of wives of the colonial elite in this segment manifests itself as petty, vindictive, and covetous, that of their husbands appears no less so. This notion finds itself embodied in the character of Vilouin, whose name curiously nearly finds a homonym in the word “villain.” Again, the witnessed “forbidden kiss” acts as the motivation for the greater part of the scene:

Vilouin, directeur de l’Intérieur, croyait enfin venue l’heure de sa revanche. Les humiliations quotidiennes que lui faisait subir Victor Hugues, c’était à son tour de les lui infliger. Le scandale était trop éclatant pour que la gloire du gouverneur n’en reçût quelque salissure. Qui sait ? L’empereur pourrait bien rappeler en métropole son zélé serviteur, et lui, Vilouin se verrait nommer gouverneur par intérim (p. 22).

Not only are we witness to (another) preview of the governor’s severe, authoritarian character and style of governance, but we can also see echoed more evidence of the pettiness, jealousy, and rivalry amongst the colonial elite first introduced earlier, which presents the (absurd) social

network of the wives of the colonial officials. Particularly striking is the use of the noun “revanche,” which clearly indicates dissension, or at least dissatisfaction on the part of Vilouin. Later on in the narrative, one infers that other high-ranking colonial officials entertain similar sentiments of dissension and dissatisfaction with the governor’s policies and management style as we witness the cabinet’s nearly unanimous opposition to Hugues’ decision to create a “compagnie de chasseurs noirs,” of which the D’Chimbo character will eventually take command. Nevertheless, the use of such forceful and revealing nouns as “revanche,” “humiliations,” “scandale,” and “salissure,” as well as the verbs “subir” and “infliger” indicate that all is not necessarily harmonious among the colonial cabinet under Hugues’ leadership. Although it might be argued that many, if not most, imperfectly constructed, yet (technically) democratically-inspired governing bodies experience ideological dissension, petty jealousies and rivalries, and opposition to the appointed leader, in this instance, Patient’s narrative emphasizes such deficiencies in a manner that implies hypocrisy and moral corruptibility. Thus, the reader encounters a governing body ill-suited to govern subjugated masses based on the claim of cultural, social, intellectual, and racial superiority, with additional undertones of megalomania, in the appointment or election of “inappropriate” individuals. At the same time, however, Vilouin’s internally professed need and desire for revenge points to a more generalized deficiency of character as it indicates that jockeying for position of rank within the colonial hierarchy and infrastructure is more important than the actual work of governing or directing the colony to a position of economic and social prosperity. In this sense, as depicted in this particular scene as elsewhere, one can conclude that the governance of the colony, as it stands in the narrative, seems absurd or illogical, due to the fact that the colonial elite appear more motivated by

individual prestige and advancement, rather than by doing what is best for the land and the people, with which they have been charged.

The Prologue-Epilogue of Patient's narrative ends with Vilouin's revelation to the governor of the now infamous embrace that has the gossipy social network of the colonial elite buzzing. The revelation catches Hugues off-guard, and the reader witnesses a near instantaneous transformation in the governor's demeanor. Immediately prior to Vilouin's announcement, the governor appears in good humor, confident in his governing abilities and what he feels to be the innovative decision to create his "compagnie de chasseurs noirs," with D'Chimbo at its head. At the same time, we see a reiteration of the social and political intrigue introduced earlier amongst the gossiping wives:

Or Victor Hugues, ce matin-là, semblait de si bonne disposition, son allure était si fringante, son abord si étrangement agréable, son bonjour si avenant que Vilouin, servilement dressé à accorder son humeur à celle de son maître, prit, en le voyant, une mine réjouie, mais aussitôt, se souvenant de sa scabreuse mission, et songeant avec des frissons prémonitoires à la scène que lui réservait son épouse s'il se montrait incapable de s'en acquitter, le sourire qu'il venait à peine d'esquisser se figea en une grimace de panique, un rictus d'affliction, une contorsion contrite, bref un enlaidissement généralisé de sa figure poupine (p. 23).

The hesitation and fear of the governor that Vilouin demonstrates prior to his big revelation underscores the pettiness of character that the text seems to wish to convey regarding the moral bankruptcy of the colonial masters. Vilouin's facial transformation is subsequently mirrored and magnified by a change in demeanor on the part of Hugues who, upon learning of the miscegenous embrace, erupts into an internal monologue of vituperative malevolence based

solely on his sergeant's "audacious" crossing of the racial divide upon which colonial ideology professes to be predicated. Never mind that just moments earlier, the exemplary work that D'Chimbo had been performing, from a military standpoint, had left the governor self-congratulatory. As we see near the end of the narrative in a discussion with Lady Stanley implicating an English injustice towards the black race, and which reeks of hypocrisy, the governor's justification for promoting D'Chimbo to a military rank of importance holds together, just as long as no racial barriers are crossed. But by daring to embrace a white girl, D'Chimbo has demonstrated an audacious, unacceptable breach of race and of decorum, which merits, to Hugues' implied way of thinking, an instantaneous and severe change in their relationship: "Il se prit à détester D'Chimbo, à le haïr d'une passion meurtrière (p. 26)."

To put it briefly, the second segment/chapter of Patient's novella tells the story of D'Chimbo's capture, enslavement, sale, and subsequent relationships with his new masters, the Stanleys. This portion of the narrative, more so than any other, highlights the violence, tragedy, and injustice of the slave trade. Here, too, the reader is introduced to the pervasive undertone of sexuality that permeates D'Chimbo's character and influences his interactions with virtually all of the major female characters. The scene opens in Africa with D'Chimbo making love to his wife, Natéké. Immediately prior to the both of them achieving climax, D'Chimbo is brutally ripped from the arms of his lover, suffering an excruciating "coup de chicote" in the process (p. 29). The scene functions as an indictment testament of the perverse violence associated with the slave trade, and a bit further on, the social and cultural injustice of "la traite" is underscored by D'Chimbo's permanent separation from his wife and the barbarous excision of the right hand of his fellow slave and countryman, the sculptor Bakota. Additionally, the coitus interruptus encountered in this scene serves as a foreshadowing element of the frustrations, violence-based



and otherwise, that D'Chimbo will later experience at the hands of the white colonizers. Interestingly, this portentous literary component is tied inextricably with the sexual act, and it is indeed sexual contraventions that will cause D'Chimbo the most trouble with Lady Stanley, Victor Hugues, Virginie Barel, and the colonial elite of the French Guiana as depicted in the novella in general.

Upon arrival in the colony, D'Chimbo is put on display on the auction block in a public spectacle that is portrayed as absurd and grotesque, and yet as “l’attraction la plus courue de la société coloniale (p. 31).” This scene is pivotal to the novella’s plot for multiple reasons. First, it is upon the auction block that the dehumanization of D'Chimbo, most noticeably occurs. Secondly, it is upon the auction block that D'Chimbo initially discovers the potential effects of language:

Un mot l’avait frappé : sexe. Le commissaire, en le prononçant, faisait curieusement claquer sa langue et pointait sa baguette de bambou sur un détail d’anatomie que même les bêtes ont coutume de dérober à la curiosité des foules. Si bien que D'Chimbo, comprenant à la longue ce qui, chez lui, était le sexe : « voilà mon vocabulaire enrichi », pensait-il (pp. 35-36).

Interestingly, D'Chimbo’s first significant experience with the French language ties into the pervasive undertones of sexuality that will color so much of his character and the narrative itself in the scenes to follow. This also is an issue that we shall explore a bit more in depth a little further ahead. Nevertheless, as D'Chimbo has settled in with his new “owners” and begun a sexual liaison with Lady Stanley (who, it is worth noting, is portrayed as a woman of nearly insatiable sexual appetites), finds Patient’s protagonist fully realizing what he perceives to be the true key to unlocking the mysteries of his colonial masters and the “power” inherent to such

knowledge. Partially cited earlier in the introduction to the current study, it is repeated here not only for the purposes of expediency, but for its relevance to the discussion at hand:

Il savait bien ce qu'il voulait. Pénétrer dans la société du maître, y pénétrer sans effraction. La langue était la clef de cette société fermée au seuil de laquelle il était las de croupir. Il voulait échapper à la malédiction du « petit-nègre », ce sabir d'esclaves voués au marronnage (pp. 41-42).

Here, as encountered often throughout the narrative, Patient uses free indirect discourse (FID) to convey the thoughts, feelings, observations, etc. of the primary character, D'Chimbo. Patient additionally employs this narrative element elsewhere in the novella and with different characters to varying degrees. In Chapter 8 of her work entitled *Narrative Fiction*, author Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan discusses the implications of the use of FID within a narrative. As one of the functions of FID, Rimmon-Kenan argues that, "The FID hypothesis (even if not thought of in these terms) is often necessary in order to identify speakers and assign given speech-features or attitudes to them. This enables the reader to make senses of 'deviant' linguistic processes, unacceptable attitudes or even lies without undermining the credibility of the work or of the implied author [Ron 191 1, pp. 28-9] (p. 114)." The use of FID as cited above affords Patient the opportunity to convey D'Chimbo's "attitude" toward the situation in which he presently finds himself, as well as to communicate a certain boldness on the part of the protagonist. A further function of the FID hypothesis, maintains Rimmon-Kenan, is to

...assist the reader in reconstructing the implied author's attitude toward the character(s) involved. However...a double-edged effect may be noticed. On the one hand, the presence of a narrator as distinct from the character may create an ironic distancing. On the other hand, the tinting of the narrator's speech with the character's language or mode

of experience may promote an emphatic identification on the part of the reader [Ewen 1968; McHale 1978; and many others] p. 115).

In the instance discussed here, as elsewhere in his text, it would seem that Patient's use of FID does indeed at least attempt to function as a vehicle for an "empathetic identification on the part of the reader." We are granted access to D'Chimbo's inner sensibilities toward his enslavement and his motivations for overcoming this state of suffering that has been forced upon him. Also conveyed is a very personalized and articulated sense of desire, a significant theme which, in the story to follow, assists in illuminating, as well as foreshadowing, the protagonist's actions and reasoning.

In the scene currently under scrutiny, again the reader finds language and sexuality intertwined; specifically, in the expressions "pénétrer" and "pénétrer sans effraction." And, it is no less interesting, and perhaps consequential, that this pivotal discovery comes on the heels of a lovemaking session with the lady of the house. But D'Chimbo's desire to "penetrate" colonial society through learning the master's language also causes a serious rift in his relationship with Lady Stanley when he insists that she address him in the formal "vous," as she does with her husband, and thereby putting an end, temporarily, to their sexual encounters. One interpretation for this desire to master the French language comes to us directly from the first chapter of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in which the author argues that the acquisition of the colonizer's language is indicative of an "inferiority complex" on the part of the colonized as such language acquisition gives him the delusion that he will consequently acquire a sense of equality with the colonial elite (p. 25). Thus, one might argue, D'Chimbo's linguistic desire could be inferred as a subconscious manifestation of a lack of self-worth. However, the narrative's depiction of D'Chimbo's conscious desire to use French as part of a larger strategy to transcend

the limits placed upon him by his colonial masters never entirely expresses itself in an explicit fashion. Through the end of the storyline, D'Chimbo appears to maintain a belief in his strategy of mimicry as a means of transcending the socio-cultural and racial limits placed upon him, a belief emphasized by the conviction that performing the duties assigned to him will earn him a military promotion that would put him on par with many of his colonial superiors.

Patient's narrative punctuates the ultimately temporary estrangement between D'Chimbo and Lady Stanley, predicated upon the slave's attempts to transcend "his place," with a simple, yet highly descriptive phrase, which highlights Bhabha's notion of ambivalence rather succinctly, albeit in a personalized and specific manner: "Déchirés entre la haine et le désir, ils cessèrent de s'accoupler comme des bêtes (p. 45)." Nonetheless, D'Chimbo has audaciously demanded the same respect as a white man. Lady Stanley, at this point in the narrative embodying much, if not most of the ideals common to the colonizer as argued by Memmi, Césaire, Fanon, and Glissant, among others, recognizes the threat posed by such audacity, and, as a consequence, begins to treat her slave and erstwhile lover in a manner consistent with the more dehumanizing aspects of colonial ideology. For a time, she insists on speaking "petit-nègre" to D'Chimbo, looks for ways to "humiliate him," and, in one culminating instance, castigates him disproportionately for inadvertently allowing a teacup to shatter on the floor. D'Chimbo's internal rage is evident and descriptively presented, and not all that dissimilar to the description of Hugues' internal ranting in the previous chapter. The difference, however, is that while the narrative suggests that Hugues acts outwardly on his anger-induced impulses, D'Chimbo appears to direct his own inwardly, and with much less "murderous" focus.

The subsequent segment of Patient's novella devotes its attention to the characterization of Victor Hugues, who, in this part of the text, is introduced as a "strange," "paradoxical," and

“enigmatic” figure, marked by, as shown earlier, violent tendencies, as well as by military and governmental aptitude, and an unquestionable force of character. Also described as a true product of the French Revolution, Hugues’s inherently violent character is exemplified through the recounting of an incident in which he is rumored to have cruelly “solved” a pesky problem: “On raconte que Victor Hugues, pour se débarrasser des prisonniers anglais fait à la Guadeloupe, les fit placer en avant de la ligne du bâtiment chargé de bombarder le fort d’Antigue (p. 49).” Not only does this excerpt demonstrate a resolve on the part of the governor to resort to brutal measures without hesitation, but it also introduces the reader to a downplayed, yet not insignificant hatred of the English. An extreme animosity toward France’s fiercest colonial rivals appears to serve a double role within the narrative. First, it underscores the justification of violence which is shared by nations with similar colonial goals, discourses and ideologies, effectively implicating colonialism itself, on the whole, as an inherently violent institution. Secondly, we would speculate that the utter disdain for the British that we see in these pages could be construed as reference to Bouyer’s *Notes*, to which, as we have established, Patient’s text responds. In point of fact, the astute reader familiar with both works will find a number of similarities between the Hugues character as presented by Patient, and the narrative voice of Bouyer’s *Notes*. Both express an unmistakable disdain for the British Empire, both appear as wholly supportive and representative of the French colonial enterprise, both justify the use of violence to achieve their objectives, both are marked by paradox and hypocrisy, and both demonstrate a disrespect for anybody whom they might consider an underling or “beneath” their stations in life.

Following the introduction to and commentary on the Hugues character, the remainder of the segment focuses on Hugues’ response to the burgeoning maroon rebellion, in which he

announces to his colonial council, his plans to create a “compagnie de chasseurs noirs” and in so doing, require each plantation owner to forfeit one slave each to the cause. The governor’s announcement is met with vehement protests from the council, but in the end, Hugues exercises dictatorial control to implement his plan: “Messieurs, dit-il, vous n’avez pas à juger du bien-fondé de mes décisions. Je suis le chef de la colonie, et j’exerce l’autorité militaire, seul et sans partage (pp. 52-53).”

As Hugues sets out on his mission to announce and to ensure the plantation owner’s compliance with his orders by personally requisitioning slaves to form his company of black soldiers, his first stop is at the Stanley plantation, where he first encounters D’Chimbo. Both men find themselves impressed and intrigued with one another. D’Chimbo admires the governor’s countenance, “[le] ton de la voix, l’élégance de la tenue, l’air de courtoisie distante qui inscrivait dans la commissure des lèvres une trace subtile de tendresse et de mépris...(p. 60).” The governor, for his part, finds D’Chimbo capable, well-built, well spoken, and “civilized”: « Il est jeune, pensait-il, et fort bien fait. Il a une certaine civilité dans les manières. Ah ! Si seulement il était blanc, j’en ferais un capitaine de la garnison » (p. 60) Thus, despite D’Chimbo’s hopes of penetrating colonial society and becoming an equal, we see in Hugues’ internal monologue that this can never be, true to the behavior and ideology of the colonizer, as maintained by Memmi, Fanon, and many others. Nevertheless, the initial interaction between the governor and slave introduces us to the theme of mimicry, and we see further evidence of colonial ambivalence in the scene. The reciprocity of respect and admiration between the two men additionally belies an element of homoeroticism as there exists not only a mutual appreciation of behavioral attributes, but that of one another’s physical characteristics as well. This subtextual homoeroticism perhaps also explains, at least in part, Victor Hugues’ enraged

reaction and feelings of betrayal later in the storyline upon learning of the embrace shared between D'Chimbo and Virginie Barel.

A description of Cayenne in the early 19th century opens the fourth and shortest segment of Patient's novella, and we see D'Chimbo promoted to sergeant without much explanation as to why, other than the previously expressed good impression that the slave has made on the governor. In essence, the segment serves as a transitional literary device, setting the scene for the latter part of the narrative.

After the verbal promotion granted by the governor, D'Chimbo is dismissed, and directed to his billet at the home of the colony's prosecutor, Barel. En route, the reader is treated to an internal monologue, in which a budding identity crisis is introduced amid the powerful desire to prove himself an equal and the painful memories of his losses and humiliations at the hands of this colonial enterprise. D'Chimbo thus finds that "[son] projet se situ[e] à mi-chemin entre la vile soumission et la révolte haineuse (pp. 71-72)." The newly appointed sergeant temporarily assuages his mental torment by deciding that the D'Chimbo that he once was no longer exists, and that it is perhaps time to "move on." As he arrives for the first time at the Barel house, he is greeted warmly by Monsieur and Madame Barel, and D'Chimbo's innate sexuality again, though quite subtly in this instance, surfaces in his initial interaction with the prosecutor's wife. Though nothing comes of the sexual tension exhibited between Victorine and D'Chimbo, it is interesting to note that some form of sexual interaction occurs between him and each of the women he encounters in the novella. Other than the threat to the colonial balance, based on racial differences, that such ubiquitous sexuality engenders, one can only speculate as to why the author chose to employ this particular plot element. Whether intentional on the part of the author or not, the omnipresent sexual attraction to D'Chimbo suggests one of two, or quite possibly

both, functions. The first being a rather transparent attempt to emphasize the physical and sexual superiority of the black hero, thereby, through the use of reverse-discourse, turning traditional colonial ideology in this regard on its head. Or, in other words, to essentially imply that black men are physically and sexually more desirable than white men. Secondly, and perhaps a little less conspicuously, D'Chimbo's ever-present carnal desirability conceivably functions as a jab at the European colonial romanticizing of the exotic Other, which is best exemplified by Virginie's fantasizing of him ravishing her a bit further on in the storyline:

Dans le théâtre de son imagination elle lui avait bien sûr assigné un rôle de jeune premier, mais sans penser qu'il pourrait véritablement jouer ce rôle sur la scène de la société coloniale. Elle pouvait rêver que D'Chimbo, prince d'Ethiopie ou de quelque autre contrée barbare, forçait à coups de bélier les portes de la citadelle dans le seul dessein de la « ravir » à son père et à sa mère, et elle consentait à ce rapt avec ivresse (p. 100)

After introducing D'Chimbo to his wife, Monsieur Barel gives the sergeant a tour of the house, which would represent an otherwise innocuous textual development, but the insinuation that D'Chimbo must use different kitchen and bathing facilities reminds the reader that, although he has ascended to a status of nominal respect and privilege, he is, at the core, still a servant, unable to transcend social and racial barriers. Also of note is the physical construction of the housing compound, which is completely walled off, and appears to reiterate D'Chimbo's earlier observation that he is a pawn in this "société fermée," the walls literally and metaphorically keeping the family (and nation, by associative extension) closed in upon itself - which must inevitably lead to stagnation and, thus, decay, while at the same time, excluding and refusing easy entry to any intruders or interlopers.



Next, the narrative veers from the storyline and turns to a description of domestic life in the Barel household prior to the arrival of D'Chimbo. The scene conveys little that might be considered a particularly harsh critique of colonial life other than a description of Victorine's alcoholic ennui and nostalgia for her homeland, which seems to point out the absurdity of forcing individuals to migrate to other lands where happiness, familiarity, and comfort remain elusive. Otherwise, the portrait of domestic life in the home of the prosecutor offered by the text could be one of any bourgeois European family, with an over-indulgent father, a smothering mother, and a daughter who, consequently and understandably, prefers the company of her father.

The text subsequently brings us back to the present, and we witness the initial meeting between D'Chimbo and the Barel's daughter, Virginie. Again, sexual tension is evinced as, forgetting their racial and social stations momentarily, they share a laugh of pleasure for practically no reason at all other than the subtextualized sexual attraction that they must be feeling for one another. But reality sets in as both realize the dangers that would ensue should their interaction, there on the beach where anyone could happen upon them, become too casual. The moment of joy and initial attraction soon crashes to a halt, however, as Virginie, daughter of the liberal, abolitionist "colonizer who accepts," to use Memmi's term, queries the sergeant, " -- Ça vous amuse de tuer des esclaves (p. 89) ?," which triggers a more serious and palpable anxiety between the two, and which leads to D'Chimbo avoiding Virginie for the next five weeks as he turns his attention to completing his transformation from capable slave to remarkable military organizer and leader.

The penultimate chapter/segment of Patient's novella focuses primarily on a social ball thrown by the governor to introduce the colonial social elite to his new aide-de-camp, the newly promoted *Lieutenant* D'Chimbo, whose extraordinary metamorphosis includes having built up

and organized Hugues's "compagnie de chasseurs noirs" into an exemplary military unit. As the text explains, this has been achieved through D'Chimbo's natural leadership abilities, as well as the delusional belief on the part of the black soldiers that "Chef D'Chimbo était donc une manière de transfuge. Il avait franchi la ligne. Peut-être un jour, eux-mêmes, l'obscur piétaille, pourraient-ils la franchir à leur tour (p. 92)." But the reception hosted by the governor serves a dual purpose in that it also functions as a means for Hugues to demonstrate to the erstwhile skeptical colonial elite, in particular his colonial council, his own military and administrative "genius" through the success of his audacious and unprecedented plan to confront the maroon threat. In this way, the ball underscores another of the governor's characteristic traits, that of arrogance, which itself re-emphasizes Hugues' representation as an exemplification or embodiment of the colonizer in the most common, traditional, and classic manner.

At the "grand bal," the reader witnesses the momentary reunification of Lady Stanley and D'Chimbo, as well as his reconciliation with Virginie. For her part, Lady Stanley's reaction upon seeing her former slave and lover initiates sentiments of intense regret for having treated him in such a degrading and dismissive manner, and we see manifested secretly, a passionate longing for him, which is echoed in her discussion of Shakespeare's *Othello* with the governor, when she states "Voyez-vous, quand je lis Shakespeare, je me sens plus Desdémone que Iago... (p. 108)." As for the reconciliation between the newly appointed lieutenant and the prosecutor's daughter, the scene again bespeaks sexual tension as both entertain, internally, vivid fantasies of lascivious encounters with one another.

The novella's final segment opens with D'Chimbo tormented by what he believes to be a "true love" for Virginie, mixed with more vivid fantasies, some bordering on sado-masochism and beyond, but tempered with the realization, though try as he might to find a way to rationalize

and overcome it, that the colonial society of which he is a pawn could never allow such a union between two individuals of differing races and social status. Lieutenant D'Chimbo's troubled reverie is broken by the governor who commissions him to contact the leader of the rebellious maroons, Pompée, and offer him and his band amnesty in exchange for surrender, and informs him that en route to the maroon village, "Tu t'arrêteras à l'aller chez M. Stanley pour y passer la nuit (p. 111)." In the meantime, the lieutenant makes his way to the beach, where he knows he will find Virginie, to present his goodbye. The weight of the idea of his absence excites a proverbial throwing of caution to the winds as the pair succumbs to desire and we witness Virginie "se [jete] dans ses bras comme une désespérée... (p. 116)." Presumably, this is the scene which Vilouin has witnessed through his spyglass, the narrative's climax, which is subsequently reported to the governor, as recounted in the Prologue-Epilogue.

D'Chimbo's return to the Stanley plantation marks the final scene of the narrative. At this point, Lady Stanley has completely surrendered to her passions, and she professes her love directly and without reservation. "-- Mon Dieu, comme je t'aime ! dit-elle (p. 119)." D'Chimbo also capitulates to emotion, and we watch as the couple engages in a final, unreserved lovemaking session. However, the scene, and the narrative, is closed as Lady Stanley presents her lover with a whip, with which she insists he beat her. The request inundates his memory with the image of Natéké, "et il ressentit cette douleur atroce au creux des reins (p. 122)." And with that, the novella terminates as "[lentement], sa main, armée de la cravache, se [lève] (p. 122). What motivates Lady Stanley to desire and initiate such an absurd and extreme request? Has she recognized the injustice of her past transgressions against her former slave as a product of colonial discourse? Perhaps, if so, she is searching for a means of expiation. In this manner, and perhaps quite transparently, Lady Stanley here personifies the totality of those of the white

European race who have recognized their moral and racial transgressions, seeking to, in a fairly explicit instance of mimicry, take the place of the slave, exemplified by the request to be whipped. Furthermore, the imagery associated with the whip and the act of whipping carries with it clear historical and ideological associations of the violence of slavery and the use of corporal punishment as a means of reprimand and enforcement tied to the colonial régime. By association, the whip signifies the severe nature of power. In the article “Power and Humanity, or Foucault among the historians,” Randall McGowen argues,

The slave owners were defined by the absolute power they possessed. The abolitionists easily identified this power with an older style of tyranny and despotism. This meant first and foremost the control over life and death, but it assumed its particularly graphic form in the shape of the whip. ‘The whip is itself,’ wrote William Wilberforce, ‘a dreadful instrument of punishment; and the mode of inflicting that punishment shockingly indecent and degrading’ (p. 104).

Thus, implicated directly in the scene currently under discussion are the colonial realities as they existed in French Guiana within the existing power structure of the colonial administration and elite. In another instance of reverse-discourse, we see again a reversal of colonial roles as the text attempts, rather flatly, to upend the colonial past of the territory while exposing the violence upon which that past was predicated.

In keeping with this thematic element, and, to put it in the most succinct of terms, Aimé Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme* argues that colonialism is an inherently violent institution (p. 22). According to Césaire, violence pervades all aspects of colonialism’s multi-faceted and frequently ambiguous agenda. Not only is physical violence (i.e. torture, murder, beatings, etc.) used to establish, enforce, and maintain colonial rule and domination, but also the frequently

aggressive suppression of the colonized people's cultures and lifestyles. In his *Discours*, Césaire provides us with examples of such suppression:

Moi, je parle des sociétés vidées d'elles-mêmes, des cultures piétinées, d'institutions minées, de terres confisquées, de religions assassinées, de magnificences artistiques anéanties, d'extraordinaires possibilités supprimées (pp. 19-20).

The terminology used by the famous Martinican theorist in this citation highlights the association of violence with the suppression of culture. Still, as argued by Césaire, brute physical force is a major component of colonial domination and he provides us with multiple examples of barbarity, including burnings, pillaging, destruction (p. 16), theft, rape (p. 19), torture, and murder (p. 21).

Analogous methods of physical violence and cultural suppression can be found throughout Patient's fictional chronicle of French colonialism in French Guiana. Perhaps the most striking and perceivable example of physical violence is illustrated in the story of D'Chimbo's capture, which subsequently results in his enslavement:

Les blancs l'avaient d'abord surpris sur le ventre de sa femme. Il avait vu les yeux de Natéké se dilater soudain, s'écarter comme sous la tension du plaisir qui le possédait lui-même, puis quelque chose l'avait griffé, cisailé, foudroyé, aux creux des reins, douloureuse morsure de scolopendre qui l'avait fait hurler (p. 29).

In this example, Patient's straightforward and rather brief description emphasizes the abruptness of his capture and the resulting physical pain. The reader's attention is drawn to the manner in which the sequence of descriptive terms quite succinctly echoes the gradual progression of increasing physical pain. This textual strategy foreshadows the analogous progression of psychological pain encountered later in the novella as D'Chimbo confronts a confused, ambivalent crisis of identity. However, D'Chimbo is not the only character to suffer

violence at the hands of the colonial enterprise. As alluded to earlier, following the description of D'Chimbo's capture, we learn of the mutilation suffered by his friend, Bakota. It becomes evident that Bakota's suffering is also two-fold, consisting of both corporeal and psychological agony: "Un coup de machette l'avait privé de sa dextre, et c'était bien la pire mutilation que l'on put faire subir à un sculpteur (p. 29). This act of violence borne by Bakota is reminiscent of Césaire's indictment of colonialism as cited above<sup>6</sup>. By robbing the artist of his talents, the colonial enterprise has effectively stripped D'Chimbo and Bakota's people of an important means of cultural expression. With this example, Patient's text simply, yet effectively demonstrates that the annihilation of indigenous culture is indeed a pervasive phenomenon attached to colonial strategies, a phenomenon which the author himself endeavors to actively confront through the publication of this narrative itself.

A third concrete and significant example of obvious violence in Patient's novella can be found in the ambiguous fate of D'Chimbo's wife, Natéké, introduced above. Raped by slave hunters in front of D'Chimbo, Natéké is forcibly separated from her husband. It is unclear what form this separation takes. Has she been killed? Sold into slavery herself? Or simply left behind due to some non-specified logic on the part of the slave hunters? Natéké's role in the narrative, while fleeting in appearance, is nonetheless significant because her suffering shows precisely how pervasive is the violence associated with colonialism and its corollary institution of slavery. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the otherwise non-discriminatory nature of colonial violence, and that it is directed towards all components of indigenous society, regardless of gender and, presumably, class.

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<sup>6</sup> An idea which is confirmed by Frantz Fanon in his chapter on national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth* (p.258).

As I have touched upon earlier, violence is amply exemplified in *Le Nègre du gouverneur* through the narrator's depiction of the French colonial governor, Victor Hugues. In point of fact, one could easily argue that the fictional Victor Hugues character is comprehensively infused with violence, a few examples of which we have already seen. This is not surprising, considering that for the purposes of Patient's text, as we have been arguing, Victor Hugues represents the quintessential colonial authority, or, to expand upon Memmi's term, the 'colonizer' *par excellence*. One might even go so far as to maintain that the Hugues character is the very embodiment of the callous, ruthless violence so often associated with colonial subjugation. Violence appears to dictate even the most banal of the governor's actions, his mannerisms, and his language. Among the earliest indications of Victor Hugues' penchant for violence in the novella is the explosive and potentially murderous reaction by the governor upon learning of the "passionate embrace" between the black slave-turned-soldier D'Chimbo and the white daughter of the colony's chief prosecutor:

Enfer et damnation, tonnerre de concordat, sapristi et sacrebleu, enfant de merde et putain conjugués, saperlipopette, cré nom d'une pipe, d'une chien et de sa mère... Victor Hugues, resté seul, noya sa douloureuse colère dans une longue méditation dont il n'est rapporté ici que la ponctuation (p. 25).

This evocative paragraph exemplifies the venomous nature of the Hugues character and sets the tone for Patient's personification of the colony's governor throughout the remainder of the narrative. Here, we witness the incredible amount of anger which permeates even the governor's thought process. This internal monologue serves to establish the author's portrayal of the governor's character as an essentially hateful individual at the helm of a venomous institution. As the representative of the French Empire and its colonial project in French Guiana, the cruel

and ruthless nature of Victor Hugues clearly epitomizes Patient's vision of the colonial history of his homeland. It is through the fictionalization of Victor Hugues that the narrative makes its indictment of the history of colonialism in French Guiana and the ideas that brought about its implementation. Thus, Patient's text succeeds in making a political commentary concerning the European nation upon which the author's homeland is still politically dependent. Not only is the French colonial subjugation of the indigenous peoples of French Guiana faulty in its actuality, but its history, indeed its entire ideological foundation is flawed, bloodthirsty, and replete with instances of some of the darkest episodes of past human existence.

Consistent with a literary style that is very direct and brief, Patient's narrative arrives at another commentary, this time a bit more concrete, on the history of that colonial regime under which the story unfolds.

Victor Hugues songea à son arme favorite: la guillotine. Pour l'exemple, il fit tomber quelques têtes. Ce fut peine inutile. Le jour même où fut proclamé le décret du trente Floréal plus de quinze habitations flambèrent dans une explosion de colère et de poudre. Le gouverneur s'en réjouit intérieurement (p. 51).

By evoking terms and images of the French Métropole's own bloodied past, Patient's text seems to want to convey the idea that the colonizers' violent tendencies come from the very depth of their (national) identity. Thus, again, Victor Hugues, of whom it has been previously stated, personifies the very essence of such ideals and it is through his representation that the narrative offers its philosophical analysis. And, as we have alluded to amply, Hugues' internal delight at the prospect of violent conflict exemplifies the inherent moral corruption of the discourse and ideology which he personifies. The guillotine, once used, or at least proclaimed as being employed by the French revolutionaries in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity, is now



being used in the name of suppression, disparity, and authority. The question here being, how can a society thus call itself “civilized?” Especially one whose colonial governor, the supreme representative of that colonizing society which hubristically asserts its own social and cultural superiority, takes so much pleasure in the idea of slavery itself:

Victor Hugues avait plaisir à contempler le spectacle de cette agitation fiévreuse. Les mains posées sur la balustrade du balcon, il prenait les poses d’un maître d’équipage qui, du haut de sa dunette, dirige de subtiles manœuvres. “J’arriverai bien à renflouer le navire,” pensait-il (p. 66).

It readily becomes apparent that a man whose character appears thus inherently permeated with violence, and who consequently acts as ambassador of the French government (and, by extension, of French society in general) speaks volumes about alternative perceptions of the French presence in French Guiana which are thoroughly explored throughout the novella.

In addition to the blatant examples of physical brutality which the reader witnesses in *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, the text additionally presents a more subtle type of violence often experienced by colonized peoples at the hands of their colonial “masters.” This phenomenon is addressed by Aimé Césaire in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* in what he terms “thingification.” According to Césaire’s interpretation, the colonial process alters the humanity of men, turning the colonizer into an “instrument of institution,” while at the same time turning the colonized into an “instrument of production (p. 19).” This process consequently converts the colonized subject into a “thing,” stripping him of his humanity. Modern psychologists are quick to point out that “abuse,” to employ the most generic interpretation of the term, most often takes the form of physical *and* mental abuse and neglect. If we define violence simply as inflicting harm upon one another, it is therefore not too large of a leap in logic to argue that the belittlement of the

colonized is indeed a congruous example of psychological violence. In *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, the belittlement of D'Chimbo goes a few steps beyond simple "thingification" in his treatment at the hands of the colonial "elite." Not only is he regarded as a "thing" by the white colonizer class, but also as a child and a monster, reminiscent of Bouyer's depiction of the historical D'Chimbo in the fourth chapter of his *Notes*. We see in this brief depiction of D'Chimbo as a beast, or a monster, a direct example of Patient's textual description of the character confronting that of Bouyer's narrative. But we shall come back to this concept a bit further ahead. The denigration of D'Chimbo through his interactions with the colonizers occurs with noticeable frequency throughout Patient's novella, such as in the scene in which he is, publicly, assessed as a "belle pièce" on the auction block (p. 32). A bit further on in the scene, he is also referred to as "un étalon," emphasizing the "animalization" of his being while at the same time, and conversely, further dispossessing him of his humanity. However, D'Chimbo's reduction to the level of thing, child, and beast perhaps most strongly punctuated through the presentation of his interactions with the novella's fictionalization of Victor Hugues and, intermittently, with the text's characterization of Lady Stanley - the narrative's primary female antagonist. Despite Lady Stanley's professed "love" for D'Chimbo, and the governor's alleged admiration of his appointed sergeant of his newly formed *compagnie des chasseurs-noirs*, the persistence of the two primary antagonists in addressing the protagonist in the familiar "tu," and their tendency (in particular that of Lady Stanley) to "talk down" demonstrate the arrogant behavior of the European colonizers who assume a position of superiority over the "savage" black slave. As Fanon suggests in *Black Skin, White Masks*, speaking to D'Chimbo in this patronizing manner acts as a means of communicating the idea that he should "keep his place," thereby reinforcing the colonial assumption of superiority, and accomplishing the "thingification" of the novella's

central character (p. 34). Although Lady Stanley eventually comes to rectify this attitude, albeit in a somewhat ambiguous manner, here the initial treatment of D'Chimbo makes a statement about the self-importance of the white European colonizers. The fact that she is of British origin suggests that such an attitude is not exclusive to French colonizers; rather it reflects a mindset originating, at least for the purposes of this particular narrative, from the European continent -- and one which implicates more than just the French colonial experience.

In spite of the ubiquitous sexual prowess which he displays throughout the narrative, D'Chimbo's reduction to the status of thing, child or animal has effectively emasculated him -- at least superficially. In keeping with our definition of violence as simply harming another individual, we see that this virtual emasculation is yet another tactic of the colonial strategy of complete and total dominance. Depriving D'Chimbo of his masculinity is significant to the narrative due to its contribution to the identity crisis which the protagonist experiences in the latter half of the narrative:

Il pensait que ce serait là désormais le théâtre de son existence. Il devait y jouer un rôle décisive, mais lequel ? Jusque-là le destin lui avait assigné dans la vie une place précise. Ici quelle serait-elle (pp. 72-73) ?

In this passage, the reader observes the initial stages of the aforementioned identity crisis which traps him between feelings of “la vile soumission et la révolte haineuse (p. 72).” This feeling of confusing entrapment is indicative of the ambivalence which permeates the narrative. Indeed, ambivalence plays a key role in *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, and its presence in the narrative relates to the central thesis of resistance to the French colonial domination in French Guiana to which the narrative addresses itself.

Summarizing Robert Young's analysis of the theme of ambivalence as it pertains to postcolonial studies, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin define the term as "a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person, or action (*Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, p. 12). Furthermore, elucidating Homi Bhabha's application of the term to postcolonial theory, the editors state that the theme of ambivalence,

...describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer. Rather than assuming that some colonized subjects are "complicit" and some "resistant," ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject (pp. 12-13).

Consistent with this definition, ambivalence plays another central role in *Le Nègre du gouverneur* as witnessed through D'Chimbo's actions and interactions with the colonial elite throughout the narrative. Superficially, it would seem that D'Chimbo's compliance with the governor's project of hunting down maroons is indicative of obedient submission. However, as alluded to earlier, and as the text explicitly suggests, D'Chimbo's design is unclear: "Son projet se situait à mi-chemin entre la vile soumission et la révolte haineuse (p. 72)." One of the earliest indications of D'Chimbo's ambivalent attitude towards his colonial "masters" can be found in his desire to learn the French language. Fanon states that to know a language is to understand a culture (*Black Skins, White Masks*, p. 38). To the observant reader, it becomes apparent that D'Chimbo's desire to master the French language represents an act of empowerment. For, as the text suggests, D'Chimbo realizes almost immediately that to learn French is to "[pénétrer] dans la société du maître (p. 41)." Conversely, Fanon argues that learning the master's language also

indicates a willingness to embrace cultural assimilation and therefore, acceptance of colonial domination (*Black Skins, White Masks*, p. 38). As such, the reader finds him/herself questioning whether or not D'Chimbo's strong desire to master the French language intimates a desire, whether conscious or sub-conscious, to become white, or whether, instead, it demonstrates a cunning strategy of resistance. In actuality, a definitive response to such a question is not necessarily needed. For, if D'Chimbo's desire to learn French is consistent with Bhabha's assertion that ambivalence leads to a generalized strategy of resistance by disrupting the binary balance upon which colonialism predicates itself, then the text's treatment of this desire augments its overall strategy of resistance.

A similar conclusion might be drawn upon reflection of D'Chimbo's remarkable work for the governor in his training of "la compagnie de chasseurs noirs." At one point, the text's protagonist postulates upon the possibility that if he succeeds in his mission for the governor, he might be promoted to the rank of captain, and as such, would cease to be simply "un nègre officier," but rather "tout simplement officier de l'Empire (p. 114)." Does this "ambition confuse" reflect naiveté on the part of the novella's hero, or does it hint at another, deeper, and again, more cunning strategy? Upon bidding farewell to the governor prior to departing upon his stated mission, as D'Chimbo begins to demonstrate more reflective and distinct signs of consciousness regarding the realities of colonial ideology, his thoughts turn to the "armes qu'il avait dérobées à l'arsenal de l'ennemi," and he contemplates how he might be able to use them against the governor who has so recklessly (according to the members of his colonial governing cabinet) entrusted him with such an important charge (p. 110). But in the passage that immediately follows, his subservience again surfaces, and he shows no other open signs of rebellion through to the end of the narrative. In short, the fact that Patient allows the reader to

draw his or her own conclusions regarding the protagonist's ultimate intentions reflects the ambivalent nature of the colonial reality in French Guiana which is amply illustrated in the text.

In the third chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon analyzes the relationship between “the man of color and the white woman.” Fanon’s analysis implies a certain ambivalence in the black man’s desire of white women. On the one hand, Fanon suggests that this desire represents a need to “prove himself worthy of white love (p. 51).” Similar to his conclusions regarding the nature of language in regard to colonial discourse, Fanon argues that a black man’s possession of a white woman would allow him to make the white man’s world his own (p. 51). But it is the goals of such a possession that are in fact ambiguous and therefore point to a position of ambivalence towards the white man’s world. As Fanon states at the beginning of the chapter: “Je ne veux pas être reconnu comme *Noir*, mais comme *Blanc* (p. 51).” Such a statement insinuates a desire to actually become white and deny one’s own race. However, using the analysis of Jean Veneuse’s sexual identity crisis as an example, Fanon implies that the man of color’s desire to be with a white woman implies a desire to either prove himself equal to the white man (p. 51), or to avenge himself against historical racial conceit (p. 56). At any rate, such desire often leads to an identity crisis in one form or another. As asserted earlier, D’Chimbo experiences his own identity crisis, and making use of Fanon’s analysis, it can be reasonably deduced that this is due in large part to his (ambivalent) desire of Lady Stanley and Virginie. But at the same time, what is not clear is which of Fanon’s two hypotheses regarding the black man’s desire for the white woman applies to D’Chimbo’s circumstances. Perhaps neither is valid, but conversely, it is possible that both conclusions apply. What is important, however, is that, as with this ambivalent desire to learn the French language and to obtain a promotion to the rank of captain, D’Chimbo’s confused feelings for the two white

women intensify the role of the important theme of ambivalence found pervasively within the narrative.

According to the definition proffered by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the colonizer's interactions with the colonized subject are also characterized by ambivalence (*Key Concepts* p. 13). This is manifested in the colonizer's desire to re-create his or her "assumptions, habits, and values (p. 13). In *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, characters representing the colonial elite also exhibit ambivalent behavior. This behavior is manifested most prominently through the characters of Victor Hugues, Lady Stanley, and Virginie in their individual relationships with the novella's protagonist. Hugues' decision to create a "compagnie de chasseurs noirs" is consistent with the colonial design of the duplication of its own Eurocentrism. However, as introduced previously, Hugues' decision is not appreciated by everyone in his private counsel. This division of opinion amongst the French colonial elite implies a certain fear on the part of the colonial governing body. Homi Bhabha summarizes this fear with the English expression "Almost the same, but not white," in which he theorizes that imitation menaces colonial efforts because it upsets the racial balance which colonialism strives to maintain (*The Location of Culture* p. 89)." Thus, it seems apparent that the private counsel's opposition to the governor's "radical" plans is also indicative of the fears that they themselves might be supplanted if they "donne[nt] des armes aux nègres (p. 52)."

Although Virginie and Lady Stanley appear to know what it is that they want -- both, to be with D'Chimbo, quite simply -- the narrative hints at a certain ambivalence in the desires of the two women, as well. Lady Stanley's sexual desire for D'Chimbo is countered by her treatment of him as a child and as a "monster." Thus, in spite of her attempts to transcend the sexual barriers erected by colonial discourse, her inability to escape its institutional attitudes

echoes colonialism's general ambivalence toward the colonial subject. Virginie is similarly unable to escape certain Eurocentric ideologies and stereotypes. While the text suggests that her desire for D'Chimbo is evident, the thoughts that the narrative attributes to her indicate that even she, the *least* representative of the colonial ideology in the story, cannot completely transcend her society's racism. In an example of what we might term "colonial bovarysme," this idea manifests itself through reverie of D'Chimbo, as cited above, as a "prince d'Éthiopie ou de quelque autre contrée barbare (p. 100)," and in her referring to him as "le beau ténébreux (p. 114)." In this instance, we are introduced to the concept of exoticism as Virginie fantasizes about the enticing aspects of a relationship with D'Chimbo. As Ashcroft et al. have argued, "During the nineteenth century...the exotic, the foreign, increasingly gained, throughout the empire, the connotations of a stimulating or exciting difference, something with which the domestic could be (safely) spiced (*Key Concepts*, p. 94)." As Virginie, following her father's example, is portrayed as liberal and an abolitionist, her exoticization of D'Chimbo may indeed be quite inadvertent, but nonetheless it serves as a microcosmic illustration for the exotic characterization of D'Chimbo within the larger framework of the novella. Indeed, D'Chimbo additionally serves as an element of experiencing the exotic Other for both Victor Hugues and Lady Stanley as well, but doing so in a manner that maintains the existing power dynamics amongst the primary characters and continues to preserve the colonial status quo and, by extension, hinting at or implying a certain ultimate failure on the part of the protagonist to transcend colonial boundaries. Nevertheless, the text portrays Virginie as perhaps the most insightful of the colonial elite, and perhaps even somewhat aware of such ambivalence, exemplified by her realization that "[la] vie n'était pas faite de frontières rigides. C'était un mélange intime de laideurs et de beauté, de lumière et de pourriture (p. 85)." Such postulation



by a member of the colonial elite reflects a disruption of the binary thought process upon which the colonial infrastructure depends. Furthermore, that Patient's text resists the urge to depict all of the colonizers as evil challenges the Manichean ideological component of that same infrastructure. Thus, it is clear that the theme of ambivalence, as an agent of resistance in *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, operates manifestly at many levels.

According to Homi Bhabha, within colonial discourse, ambivalence and mimicry work inextricably together as a destabilizing force to the colonial enterprise (p. 86). Explicating Bhabha's hypothesis, Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin state that,

[the] threat inherent in mimicry...comes not from an overt resistance, but from the way in which it continually suggests an identity not quite like the colonizer... The mimicry of the post-colonial subject is therefore always potentially destabilizing to colonial discourse, and locates an area of considerable political and cultural uncertainty in the structure of imperial dominance (pp. 141-142).

In *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, mimicry acts in a manner fairly consistent with Bhabha's hypothesis on the topic. Mimicry manifests itself most prominently in D'Chimbo's imitation of the French colonial elite. For his part, the governor attempts a reproduction of colonial presence by creating his *compagnie de chasseurs noirs*, and furthermore, by promoting D'Chimbo to the rank of lieutenant. In turn, D'Chimbo adopts certain habits and mannerisms that illustrate the mimicry which we have begun to explore. For example, it is not long after he takes up residence with the Barel family that he starts smoking cigarettes (p. 96). Upon arrival at the Stanley plantation just prior to the start of his mission, Victor Hugues' previous request, "M. Stanley, mon ami, veuillez faire, je vous prie, servir une rasade de rhum à mes gens (p. 57)," is repeated by the newly appointed black lieutenant in his own request: "Veuillez, je vous prie, faire servir à boire à mes

hommes (p. 117).” However, the mimetic -- similar in meaning but different in form to the governor’s own words -- exemplifies Bhabha’s hypothesis of the “slippage,” and “difference” which connects mimicry to ambivalence, the effect of which in turn strongly disturbs “the authority of colonial discourse (p. 86).” For, to borrow from Bhabha’s words, Victor Hugues’ “reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double (p. 86).” Indeed, this mimetic act is significant in its potential to disrupt the colonial authority in French Guiana. For, while the text provides us with neither the details of the outcome of D’Chimbo’s mission, nor his ultimate assimilation into or rebellion against the colonial enterprise in French Guiana, it is the possibility of rebellion that represents the menace posited by both Bhabha and Ashcroft et al. in their assertions upon the theme.

The narrative’s presentation of D’Chimbo’s imitation of the governor is also consistent with Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin’s assertion that “[the] ‘menace’ of post-colonial writing ... does not necessarily emerge from some automatic opposition to colonial discourse, but comes from this disruption of colonial authority, from the fact that its mimicry is also potentially mockery (pp. 140-141).” Indeed, the text’s depiction of Victor Hugues is itself an exercise in mockery. At various points in the novella, the narrator appears to attribute a sort of ‘God-complex’ to the governor, who holds in his hands the power of life and death, and even the fate of French Guiana, and its inhabitants. Additionally, the author’s use of the French language and a quasi-traditional literary genre to relate his narrative represents in itself a mimetic strategy that is reflected in the actions of his protagonist. While Patient’s narrative imitates conventional French literature to a certain degree, the absence of clearly defined traditional chapters and linearity, exemplified by the presence of a Prologue-Epilogue reinforces the text’s challenge to the Europeanized veracity of the cultural history of French Guiana. Although narrative structure

is no longer as much of an issue as it once was in the past, the mimicry that is produced in Patient's text still succeeds in achieving the destabilizing effect to colonial norms.

As alluded to in this and previous chapters of the current study, Florence Martin's analysis of Patient's novella, perhaps one of the only analyses to date, explains that *Le Nègre du gouverneur* offers a rewriting of Bouyer's account which comprises the fourth chapter of *La Guyane française: Notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863* (Martin, p. 12). And again, as alluded to in previous chapters of this study as well as in Martin's analysis, Bouyer's travel chronicle was subsequently followed by the publication of a fictive account of D'Chimbo in a serial novel entitled *L'amour d'un monstre. Scènes de la vie créole*, published in July and August of 1866 in the newspaper entitled *L'Événement*, in which Bouyer depicts the fictionalized historical figure of D'Chimbo as a monstrous, animal-like rapist characterized by "la brutalité, la laideur, et la lubricité de l'autre (Martin, p. 47)." As Martin states, *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, "prend le contrepied du texte [de Bouyer] (p. 12)." Thus, Patient's narrative represents an attempt to re-examine an episode of French Guianese history textually represented, until the publication of *Le Nègre du gouverneur* solely by métropolitain-French historians and authors. In his *Caribbean Discourse*, Édouard Glissant argues that the non-history of the French Caribbean, which in this particular instance can also be applied to French Guiana, is a product of French colonialism's insistence on interpreting history (p. 62), an assertion that Frantz Fanon had made nearly three decades prior in *The Wretched of the Earth* (p. 219). In Glissant's interpretation, what is needed for the recuperation of lost or distorted history is for Caribbean nations (and this also applies to French Guiana) to "break through the dead tissue that colonial ideology [has] deposited along their borders (p. 62). National literature provides the colonial subject with a means of escaping "the numbing power of Sameness," or assimilation in Glissant's view, as well

as in that of Fanon, as an active means of awakening national consciousness (Fanon, p. 240). Patient's narrative confrontation of Bouyer's chronicle represents an attempt to achieve both objectives. The novella's indictment of the violent nature of the colonial experience, and its use of the narrative strategies of ambivalence and mimicry come together in a re-investigation of Western, and in particular, French, ideas about the circumstances of colonialism in French Guiana in the past, the present, and the future.

While the story takes place in the 19th century, *Le Nègre du gouverneur* represents more than a simple condemnation of the institutions and discourses of a bygone era. On the contrary, today's reader and student of Postcolonialism can gain much from the questions it raises concerning colonial institutions and ideologies that still persist to this day. In spite of their official statuses as départements of the French Republic, French Guiana, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion, and other French territorial "possessions" continue to exist as very real vestiges of French colonialism, and, as Césaire, Fanon, Glissant, and others have abundantly argued, are still politically, economically, culturally, and socially marginalized societies due to their status as such. In the introduction to *De la Guyane à la diaspora africaine*, Martin and Favre aptly describe French Guiana's relationship to the Métropole as "jadis vaste colonie réduite aux îles du bagne, aujourd'hui, département réduit à une base de lancement (p. 9). Patient's novella serves as an opportunity for the peoples of French Guiana to resist such reduction of their history and culture through a narrative recuperation of lost, stolen, or forcibly-remembered episodes from the past.

By consulting the seventh chapter of Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction*, entitled "Narration: Levels and Voices," we can further explore, even if only briefly, Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur* within a narratological framework. From a structural point view, following

Rimmon-Kenan's model, we can deduce that the narrative voice found in Patient's novella functions as an extradiegetic narrator which permits the text an element of "omniscience" (p. 96), which in turn operates at a relatively covert 'degree of perceptibility' (p. 97). Additionally, the narrator in question can be termed a heterodiegetic narrator inasmuch as s/he is "not a character in the situations and events recounted (Prince, p. 40)." Conversely, states Rimmon-Kenan, "the narratee is the agent addressed by the narrator, and all the criteria classifying the latter also apply to the former (p. 105). Furthermore, "[the] narratee is, by definition, situated at the same narrative level as the narrator (p. 105)." According to Rimmon-Kenan's interpretation of the levels of narration and voices, the narrator of Patient's novella is reliable in that "the implied author [Patient] does share the narrator's values," and thus, "the latter is reliable in this respect, no matter how objectionable his views may seem to some readers (p. 102)." Thus, having defined just a few of the narratological parameters at work in *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, we can make the following observations. First, that the novella, despite significantly altering the time and events of the D'Chimbo legend and thereby opening itself up to accusations of distorting history, nonetheless functions as a relatively dependable vehicle for relating certain perceptions of reality from the colonial past of French Guiana and its impact on the present, at least from the point of view of the narrator and the implied author. Secondly, the idea that the narratee of the text is "situated at the same narrative level as the narrator (Rimmon-Kenan, p. 105)," indicates, generally speaking, a readership that can either expressly identify with the observations, perceptions, interpretations, etc. of the narrator/implied author, or if not, one which can at least empathize with the general message being proffered and perhaps gain something from its reading. In other words, the reader of *Le Nègre du gouverneur* might either find elements with

which to identify, or may learn something new about certain perceptions of colonial constructs in French Guiana, or perhaps both.

In the work entitled *Recent Theories of Narrative*, author Wallace Martin discusses the implications of “the novel as oppositional discourse (pp. 44-46).” Specifically, he argues,

...in relation to society and sanctioned culture, the novel takes an oppositional stance...Official cultural norms are often the intellectual embodiment of social and political relations. By depicting people and situations that have no place in accepted systems of value, the novel implicitly calls the latter into question (p. 45).

It is not difficult to conclude that Patient’s narrative falls precisely in line with this hypothesis. Thus by virtue of the form of the text alone, *Le Nègre du gouverneur* functions as an agent of counter-discourse in that it questions the status quo of the colonial ideology of the past and its continued influence into the present. In providing a voice to French Guiana’s victims of slavery through its depiction of the D’Chimbo character within a prototypical colonial setting, the narrative serves as a conduit for the counter-colonial discourse of a people that, until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, have had few means of expression in a cultural context and have been weighed down with legacies of its colonial origins. Thus, it can be argued, that from both thematic as well as formulaic levels, regardless of its current state of impact within both French Guianese and global communities, *Le Nègre du gouverneur* does indeed offer a means of oppositional discourse agency.

In conclusion, *Le Nègre du gouverneur* serves as an example of one “engaged” author’s attempt to re-write a history that has, until now, been written for him and his fellow countrymen at the hands of those whose subjugation has prevailed for centuries. In so doing, Serge Patient’s narrative attempts to validate the culture of French Guiana by providing a voice that has either

been oppressed, forgotten, or both. It is unfortunate that this text remains largely ignored, especially within the academic community, for it raises questions that need to be examined further for their relevance to post-colonial studies and theories, as well as for their potential significance to the past, present, and future of French Guiana. Perhaps with time, this narrative, and its voice of resistance to colonial discourse, will come to be more appreciated for the potential fertility of the themes and questions that can be found in and extrapolated from its words.

#### Chapter 4: Elie Stéphenon: The Continuing Rehabilitation of D'Chimbo

One of the most significant 20<sup>th</sup> century figures in French Guianese literary production is the poet/playwright Elie Stéphenon. Yet, similar to Patient, one rarely encounters reference to Stéphenon or his works within the field of postcolonial (Francophone) studies. This condition may in fact be a direct result of, as inferred by Ndagano, the lack of publishing houses, which has been one of the causes of a virtual cultural void concerning French Guianese literature (Introduction, *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* suivi de *Massak*, p. 9). Nevertheless, it seems apparent that those familiar with Stéphenon's work consider him to be an important voice in the cultural representation of some of the more marginalized elements of French Guianese society. In this chapter, Stéphenon's texts will be explored in relation to the general themes at issue in the current study and their consequent relevance to the existence or establishment of "national culture" as it may or may not exist in French Guiana at present, as well as possible implications contained therein for a culturally expressive and socially engaged future .

If Patient and Stéphenon's writings share certain textual similarities, it is, of course no surprise, for, as has been previewed in the introduction to this study, and as shall be explored again a bit further on, Stéphenon's plays, *Massak* in particular, draw their inspiration from Patient's novella. All three texts also share a certain brevity of length. As it has been argued that Patient and Stéphenon's target audiences include an apathetic readership, one might not necessarily find too much objection to the notion that the structure of a brief, yet powerful message is itself a strategy intended to break an apathetic audience of its inaction and insouciance with regard to its own historical past and its literary and theatrical present.



In the first chapter of *De la Guyane à la diaspora africaine*, Florence Martin introduces a common motivation to that which she terms as the written “traces-mémoires” of the D’Chimbo legend: “Chaque incarnation littéraire guyanaise de D’Chimbo s’attachera à déconstruire l’image de Bouyer du personnage, à réhabiliter le pouvoir du *trickster* marron, sa langue, à changer la perception de son corps, et à effacer du tableau noir les équations existentielles racistes tracées par la craie blanche (p. 60).” As we saw in the previous chapter, Patient’s novella, *Le Nègre du gouverneur* attempts to achieve this sort of physical and intellectual “rehabilitation” of the D’Chimbo figure through the interrogation of certain accepted norms passed down through written “history,” most notably by Bouyer’s description of the legend in which an animal-like, demonic, grotesquely represented man-beast is introduced. Linking Patient’s novella with Stéphenon’s first theatrical offering featuring the D’Chimbo figure, Mam Lam Fouck succinctly summarizes the fictional transformation of the legend from that of the (ostensibly) non-fictional legacy left behind by Bouyer’s travel chronicle: “...on change alors de dimension : le sanguinaire bandit de grands chemins des années 1860-1861 gagne carrément des lettres de noblesse qui font de lui un personnage tout à fait respectable (p. 60).” In this vein, similar to the highly capable, reflective, and intelligent D’Chimbo portrayed in *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, the D’Chimbo/Kalimbo protagonists of Stéphenon’s two theatrical pieces centering upon the legend also offer the representation of an otherwise ‘respectable’ individual, entirely capable of the thoughtful insight, linguistic aptitude, and humanistic compassion that is so noticeably absent in the Bouyer chronicle.

In keeping with the format of the previous chapter of the current study, which features a presentation and analysis of Serge Patient’s *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, in which an annotated synopsis of the narrative was offered, followed by further detailed analysis of the more prevalent

themes to be found, the current chapter shall again present a commentated overview of each of Stéphenson's theatrical pieces featuring the D'Chimbo figure followed by a more particularized examination of the themes and topics which dominate the thematic structures of each.

### ***La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo***

The first of Stéphenson's D'Chimbo-oriented theatrical narratives, *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo*, originally written in 1984, appears as a direct response to Bouyer's depiction of D'Chimbo as set forth in *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863*. Unlike Patient's novella, Stéphenson's *La nouvelle légende* places its timeframe in the same period as the Bouyer narrative, i.e. during the actual period of the "historical" D'Chimbo affair, and draws upon a few of the exploits of the "historically documented" criminal acts for which D'Chimbo was accused, tried, convicted, and eventually executed. However, as Mam Lam Fouck here explains, the similarities between Bouyer's narrative and that of Stéphenson's *La nouvelle légende*, end there, as Stéphenson's D'Chimbo represents a man victimized by a corrupt system and ideology which in turn motivates his actions more as a means of survival than as any inherently evil being based primarily on the stereotypes of race:

Le héros de *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo*, quant à lui, reste partiellement conforme au D'Chimbo historique puisque Stéphenson met en scène un immigré africain en rupture de ban. Mais il garde la même fonction idéologique que le D'Chimbo de Patient. Stéphenson fait de lui, en effet, l'instrument de la dénonciation des maux infligés à la société guyanaise par le système colonial. C'est par ce biais que le hors-la-loi africain suscite une sympathie dont on le gratifie volontiers, car Stéphenson prend bien soin de laisser dans l'ombre les crimes du D'Chimbo des années 1860 (pp. 62-63).

We will first, following a contextualized overview of the narrative structures and themes encountered in Stéphenson's *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo*, look specifically at the process of cultural assimilation as an elemental motivation of the primary characters presented, and at the corollary topics of racial stereotyping and racism, since they relate to assimilation as the fundamental questions of colonial discourse that is central to the analysis of Stéphenson's drama.

The Premier Tableau, act 1, scene 1 of *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* opens with a powerful soliloquy on the part of the play's protagonist perhaps designed to jolt its audience from its proverbial and actual lethargy. Full of fury and obscenity, D'Chimbo directs his verbal tirade toward his fellow workers and countrymen, belying his frustration at what he perceives to be an inexcusable betrayal of trust and kinship:

D'CHIMBO (*ALLANT ET VENANT EXCITÉ*)

Les saluads ! Les lâches ! Les pourris ! Tous ! Tous après moi comme une bande de chiens enragés, les salopards ! Mais ils ne m'auront pas ! Je les tuerai tous ! Bandes de charognards ! Bandes de crabiers puants ! Ah, les Nègres ! Ce sont eux les plus enragés contre moi ! Je vais tous les tuer. Ils me traquent tous les jours... Ils veulent ma peau, disent-ils, ils veulent m'attraper, m'emprisonner et me guillotiner ! Mais, moi, D'Chimbo aucune chaîne ne peut me retenir, je brise toute les chaînes. ! (p. 65)

Here we witness an extremely emphatic opening monologue, one rich in metaphor and sarcasm and cultural and literary historical aspects. The reader familiar with Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur* will be reminded of that work's text, re-cited here for the purposes of clarity, in which the governor, Victor Hugues, in a similar feeling of betrayal, is attributed an internal monologue, full of venom, based on the perception of betrayal:

Enfer et damnation, tonnerre de concordat, sapristi et sacrebleu, enfant de merde et putain conjugués, saperlipopette, cré [sic] nom d'une pipe, d'un chien et de sa mère... Victor Hugues, resté seul, noya sa douloureuse colère dans une longue méditation dont il n'est rapporté ici que la ponctuation (Patient, p. 25).

Both characters exhibit intense emotions relating to the betrayal of trust that they each experience at the hands of those in whom they have placed such trust and which are accentuated by the verbal explosion of profanity and the allusions to potentially deadly consequences in store for the perceived traitors. However, there exists a secondary, more subtle link between the two fictionalized instances depicted and between the characters upon which the portrayals are centered, also in the bloody imagery evoked, which suggests the fundamentally violent nature of the colonial enterprise that profoundly affects all parties concerned. However, the audience also witnesses a certain brashness on the part of Stéphençon's leading character, suggesting defiance and a determination to survive and prevail in what he perceives to be a concerted, intentional effort to bring about his demise. In this way, we are introduced to a powerful figure indeed.

The explosive opening words of the scene and of the play dominate the short presentation of the first act in which the narrative introduces the play's central figure, and in the remainder of the scene, the audience abruptly discovers the two primary requirements of the harried character, food and sex, which appear curiously and sensuously tied together in this first scene as well as in the following, even shorter Scene II. In the first scene, D'Chimbo's needs and desires are accentuated in a brief monologue which underscores the physical torment he identifies for lack of a woman's touch: "Bientôt trois mois, trois mois que je n'ai pas couché avec une femme... Ça me démange dans le corps, ça me monte à la tête...J'ai besoin de la chair d'une femme, j'ai besoin d'une femme pour rester avec moi ! (p. 65)."

Upon departing from his cabin in search of a woman and food at the end of the first scene, D'Chimbo returns in the next, "chargé d'une femme évanouie," over whom he salivates at the thought of possessing her sexually. Again, a link between food and sex is striking, as, addressing the captive woman's physical beauty, the fugitive D'Chimbo speaks of "[sa] chair appétissante" and a few lines later reveals to her ominously "Hum, hum, tu es vraiment un beau morceau... (p. 66)." However, any further elucidation upon this food-sex link is overshadowed by the acerbic exchange between the two as she spits at him and he, in response, strikes her across the face and proceeds to fall upon her, ending the scene with the stage direction "Il la viole pratiquement (p. 66)." At this point, the audience has been presented with a decidedly unsympathetic leading character, to all appearances as beastly and uncivilized as the non-fictional character described in Chapitre IV of Bouyer's *Notes*.

However, Scene III of the Premier Tableau of *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* initiates the "rehabilitation" of Stephenson's D'Chimbo as a human being capable of thought and feeling, albeit in a rather indirect manner. After satisfying himself sexually at the expense of the woman whom we now discover is called Elena, the protagonist orders her to prepare a meal. His non-European manner of consuming the meal disgusts Eléna and it is through this simple observation on her part that the audience first infers her racial and social status as belonging to the Creole bourgeoisie of French Guyana. Additionally, after repeatedly calling her "femme," Elena insists that D'Chimbo refer to her by her given name: "Je t'ai déjà dit qu'on m'appelle Eléna. Ne m'appelle pas femme. Je ne suis pas une fille des rues, moi ! (p. 67)," suggesting that she perhaps belongs to a class with a certain amount of social privilege. More noticeably, however, we witness also the first hints of D'Chimbo's denied humanity as, in response, he states "Bon, Eléna, tu vas rester ici. Je ne te ferai plus de mal ! Mais j'ai besoin d'une femme pour s'occuper

de moi et de mon carbet. Tu comprends ? (p. 67)” Conversely, an air of misogyny persists as D’Chimbo’s capture, violent possession, and ordering about of Eléna implies an attitude of assumed patriarchal license. However, we are perhaps here privy to another example of the pervasive nature of epistemic colonial discourse in D’Chimbo’s behavior towards Eléna, and, as we shall see later in the narrative, towards many other women as well. In this manner, D’Chimbo’s rough and unconstrained mistreatment of women is explained by Loomba, who argues,

Colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonised lands, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality. The outside world could be Westernised but all was not lost if the domestic space retained its cultural purity (p. 168).

While the “domestic situation” of the D’Chimbo figure depicted in Stéphenon’s *La Nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo* may diverge somewhat in the details from Loomba’s argument, the correlative effects may be considered as nonetheless applicable. As the audience will see, D’Chimbo’s escalating alienation from his fellow gold-mine workers and countrymen provide not necessarily an excuse for the criminal acts which he does in fact commit, but it does offer a bit of insight into the motivations for such acts, suggesting that external factors play a role in the person he is to become, and refuting the stereotype that such intrinsic criminality can be attributed solely on the basis of racial or cultural proclivity. However, as Scene III of the Premier Tableau proceeds, the premise of innate evil persists as a leitmotif as the audience witnesses an exchange of accusations on the part of Eléna and an initial attempt at a defense of his criminality on the part of D’Chimbo, as she refers to him in terms reminiscent of Bouyer’s

*Notes:* “sale criminel,” “assassin,” “vampire,” etc. In a similar fashion, Eléna echoes the assertions and ideology professed by Bouyer’s narrative description of the fugitive when she states, “Je n’ai pas peur de toi, D’Chimbo, je te déteste ! Criminel ! On voit ça sur ta peau, dans tes yeux, le crime, tu as ça dans le sang (p. 68).” D’Chimbo, refusing to believe any such nonsense, and wishing to be regarded as a man like every other, responds accordingly, “Tais-toi, qu’est-ce que tu radotes comme ça. Je n’ai rien dans mon sang, ni dans la peau, mon sang est comme tout autre sang (p 68).” The scene then concludes with the two characters accusing one another of being disingenuous, but also, noticeably, with D’Chimbo beginning to recognize that he is indeed at least partially guilty for his actions as he begins to tell Eléna his story:

D’CHIMBO (*ÉNERVÉ... AFFOLÉ*)

Oui, oui, oui, je suis un bandit. Mais tu sais, je n’ai pas le crime dans le sang ! Quand je suis arrivé ici, je n’étais pas comme ça ! Je suis venu en Guyane pour chercher la vie. Ecoute-moi femme, écoute-moi... (*Et D’Chimbo raconte*) (p. 69)

The Deuxième Tableau thus picks up D’Chimbo’s story and presents the audience with the beginning of his alienation and ostracization while at the same time functioning as a narrative flashback to the previous Tableau. Scene I features D’Chimbo and two of his co-workers/fellow African “immigrants” returning to their cabin from a day’s work at the gold mines, with the two workers light-heartedly badgering the protagonist about his heretofore congenial relationship with “le patron,” and his willingness to put in a hard day’s work. Another very brief scene in length, it serves essentially as a refutation of the historical D’Chimbo’s reputation as a lazy, unskilled, and devious worker. Specifically, the scene appears intent on repudiating Bouyer’s depiction of D’Chimbo as an inherent troublemaker and liability to the gold-mining company and who thus necessitated the intervention of the colony’s criminal justice system to address his

untrustworthiness and insubordinate personality. Or, as the words of Bouyer's narrative itself would have us believe, "Arrivé à la Guyane le 26 septembre 1858, il fut employé à l'exploitation aurifère de l'Approuague, où il ne tarda pas à signaler son caractère malfaisant. Les moyens disciplinaires ayant été épuisés sans qu'on parvint à dompter cette nature rebelle, on dut faire intervenir l'action plus sévère de la justice (*Notes*, p. 116)." This textual accusation is directly countered in the scene by the character identified as "Homme 2" who, in jest, refers to D'Chimbo as a "lèche-cul," and when D'Chimbo expresses obvious irritation at being called such a name, attempts to clarify his teasing comment by stating, "Ne t'énerves pas, je voulais simplement dire que tu travaillais un peu plus que nous, alors... le patron se dit que nous autres, nous sommes paresseux (p. 71)." Prevalent racial stereotypes of the time appear to be of central interest to this short scene, and indeed, as the audience witnesses further on in the narrative, seem to be one of the more predominant topics explored throughout Stéphenon's theatrical offering in general. Hence, it becomes clear in this scene, as elsewhere, that one of the primary objectives of the narrative, as exemplified in the text's portrayal of D'Chimbo, is the interrogation and rehabilitation of particular racial and cultural stereotypes, as well as historical interpretations left behind by texts such as those of Frédéric Bouyer (specifically), which continue to, in the views of Patient and Stéphenon and many others, misrepresent the cultural and historical past (and present) of the colonized peoples of French Guiana.

Scene II of the *Deuxième Tableau* finds "le patron" visiting the worker's cabin, confronting D'Chimbo over some "rumors" that he has been expressing discontent and sowing discord amongst his fellow workers. Another short scene, this one represents perhaps one of the weaker narrative components of the piece as the motives and intentions of the *patron's* visit remain somewhat cryptic. Here, the brevity of the scene combined with the unclear motivations



of the *patron*, exert a perplexing inconsistency with the flow of the narrative. To be certain, one detects a discernable theme to the scene – that of human exploitation and the correlative power dynamics inherent in the economic aspects of colonial discourse. However, the audience is offered little or no explanation, either subtle or explicit, as to why the *patron* has abruptly turned on D’Chimbo. Indeed, in the previous scene, D’Chimbo is noted by his colleagues as being a hard working individual whom the *patron*, at least in the eyes of the colleagues, favors. That in the present scene the *patron* should unexpectedly enter the workers’ cabin as the trio sets off to work in order to question D’Chimbo’s loyalty to the company, as well as his work ethic, when the complete opposite idea has been implied only hours earlier by the protagonist’s cabin-mates, suggests a certain narrative incongruity that might have been better explained by providing the audience with a discernably connective narrative element. Instead, we are introduced to a character, representative of the colonial power-base, who appears irrational and mean-spirited, without much insight as to why this individual would behave in such a manner. Certainly, one of the objectives of the scene, as well as of the narrative as a whole, appears determined to highlight the corrupt nature of the colonial infrastructure, its corresponding discourse, and the individuals responsible for such infrastructure and discourse, but here, the lack of elucidation for the sudden turn on the D’Chimbo character undermines the focus a bit. In essence, it could be argued that due to the lack of extrapolation for the illogical and unexplained actions of the white *patron*, the text essentializes *all* whites in the colony as intrinsically corrupt, illogical, and mean-spirited in much the same way as the black, colonized population has been stereotyped with disparaging “innate” characteristics.

Depicting the increasing alienation and marginalization of the D’Chimbo character from public society, the final three scenes of the Deuxième Tableau of Stéphenson’s *La nouvelle*

*légende de D'Chimbo* feature further dialogues between D'Chimbo and his two colleagues, and between *le patron* and the three African-immigrant cabin-mates/colleagues, culminating in the leading character's complete disenfranchisement at the end of the Tableau, as he sets out upon his life outside the law and French Guianese colonial society. Scene III portrays an agitated D'Chimbo who declines to share a drink of tafia with his erstwhile comrades due to his suspicions that it is they who have spread the rumors which led to the confrontation with *le patron* in the previous scene, stating "Je ne bois pas avec des Nègres qui font des «cancan», qui disent du mal dans le dos de leur camarade (p. 74)." A certain amount of masculine posturing ensues as the two men defend themselves against D'Chimbo's accusation, with the character identified as *Homme 2* ultimately suggesting that *le patron* has fabricated the rumor-mongering: "Le patron invente des histoires parce qu'il ne veut pas te payer (p. 74)." *Homme 1* concurs with his comrade's assessment, and in so doing, we witness a reversal of the colonial assertion in which, in the words of Albert Memmi, "[the] colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 85):" "Le Blanc n'est pas bon du tout... (*La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo*, p. 75)."

Suspicious, accusations and racial profiling increase in Scenes III and IV as the *patron* takes it upon himself to search the three workers' cabin in an attempt to find the gold that he claims has been stolen from him. Most noticeably, the *patron* reveals himself to be an individual of the classically constructed "colonizer" mold, à la Memmi, by stating directly, "On ne peut vraiment pas faire confiance aux Nègres. Vous êtes tous malhonnêtes (p. 76)," thereby essentializing an entire race based on his own vision of racial ethics and congenital disposition, doubtlessly itself based upon the colonial discourse being scrutinized by Stephenson's narrative.

Predictably, the action of the Tableau concludes perniciously as the *patron* finally and unambiguously accuses D'Chimbo of thievery, implying in so doing that his two comrades have “denounced him,” and by taking out a whip with which he attempts to strike the accused (p. 78). As discussed in the previous chapter of the current study with regard to the whipping scene featuring D'Chimbo and Lady Stanley, implication of both colonial ideals of racial superiority and the maintenance of the existing power structure are featured. Here again the association between power and violence in the colonial setting is evoked, and in a literal and symbolic gesture of defiance, Stéphençon's D'Chimbo evades the lash of the whip and, in gripping the patron by the throat, usurps both the actual as well as metaphorical threat of the whip as a means of control and violent domination. The audience also encounters a potentially noteworthy paradox in the comportment of the *patron* in that he now apparently tends to believe the calumnious claims of D'Chimbo's two African comrades, *Homme 1* and *Homme 2*, having previously explicitly stated that “Nègres” cannot be trusted.

The Tableau which follows brings us back to the “present,” as D'Chimbo and Eléna debate the implications of what, to his mind, has initiated the current condition of brigandage. He continues to insist that his circumstances do not exemplify an intrinsic predisposition towards criminality, instead insinuating that the Machiavellian psychology of colonial discourse (although he does not express this explicitly) drives the disenfranchised colonial subject to desperate acts, sowing discord amongst one's racial and cultural brethren: “Ce n'est pas quelque chose que nous avons dans le sang, c'est dans notre tête que ça se passe. C'est dans notre tête que le Blanc a mis cette maladie (p. 81).” Thus D'Chimbo finds himself at odds not only with the white man, representative of the colonial elite, but also with his erstwhile comrades and

countrymen, which in an instance of self-loathing that invokes Fanon's analysis of the colonized "abandonment-neurotic" in the fourth chapter of *Black Skins White Masks*, professes,

Le Nègre est pire que le Blanc ! Parce que le Nègre est couillon, méchant ! Le Blanc va te faire du tort pour ton argent, ta terre, peut-être pour une femme. Mais le Nègre n'a pas besoin de tout cela. Il te fait mal par plaisir. Regarde ! Qui m'a causé le plus de tort ? C'est ma propre race. Ce sont eux qui ont monté un complot. Ce sont eux qui m'ont envoyé en prison (p. 81).

D'Chimbo and Eléna's dialectical exchange thereby turns to a discussion and narrative exploration of the implications of assimilation and complacency amongst the colonized population of French Guiana, a topic that shall be explored in more detail a bit further on in the current chapter.

The brief third Tableau of Stéphenson's theatrical piece is followed by an even shorter fourth Tableau consisting of only two scenes and also serves as a flashback to the previous Tableau. The setting occurs in a saloon in which the play's lead character proposes marriage to one of the women of questionable virtue, known locally as "matados." Consistent with many other parts of the narrative, the dialogue in these scenes is concise and direct, and offers the audience little room for interpretation regarding the actions, thoughts, and motivations of the characters as they are presented. The matado who is the target of D'Chimbo's affections, whom we learn midway through Scene I is named Isabelle, appears as a congenial enough sort, but one who is stimulated by money and material comforts above all else. Reacting to D'Chimbo's proposition, Isabelle tersely replies "Non, ce n'est pas possible, D'Chimbo. Pas la peine d'en parler, arrêtons-là (p. 86)." And, a bit further on, in response to his further supplications: "Ce n'est pas le [sic] peine, je ne serai jamais ta femme (p. 87)."

Still hoping to be able to change Isabelle's mind, D'Chimbo returns to the drinking establishment in search of his beloved matado in Scene II only to find her absent, but her provocative associate, identified as *2ème Matado*, ready and willing to augment his misery by calling attention to his "deficiencies," the most pronounced of which appears to be the blackness of his skin, which she accentuates, by referring to him as "un gros Nègre noir." Although featuring a dialectical exchange with a minor character, the scene is pivotal to the development of the D'Chimbo character in that the pervasiveness of racist discourse upon which colonial society, and in this case, the Guyane colony specifically, and which seems to infect each character so profusely, presents an important basis for the fugitive thug which he will become. The ubiquitous racism with which the audience is confronted in Tableau V, as elsewhere throughout the narrative, represents another topic that shall be explored in more detail a bit further on.

The fifth and briefest of the seven Tableaux that comprise the narrative structure of Stéphenon's *La nouvelle légende* returns the audience once again to the "present," where we once again find D'Chimbo and Eléna engaged in a pseudo-philosophical debate centered upon the topic of victimization, persecution and oppression as they relate to the three races and their corresponding social classes in the Guyane colony which are featured in the narrative. In effect, the character of Eléna here acts as a representative of the Créole/Mulatto bourgeoisie, which, it will be argued, is not entirely free from persecution at the hands of the white colonial elite. Responding to D'Chimbo's continuing assertions that he, as a representative of the black-African-immigrant working class (now that slavery has been abolished for some 10-years), has been effectively victimized to the point of criminality, as well as to his accusation that "...toutes les femmes de Guyane, vous rêvez d'avoir un Blanc, un Mulâtre dans votre lit !, Vous voulez

toutes éclaircir la peau de la famille,” Eléna protests “C’est ça, D’Chimbo, comme tout coupable, tu fais de grands discours. Ce que tu dis est faux ! Tu vois bien qu’ici les Nègres vivent avec les Nègres avant tout, les Blancs avec les Blancs et ainsi de suite. Nous les Créoles, nous méprisons les Blancs ! (p. 91).” As alluded to above, this scene/tableau again confronts racial stereotypes, as the audience witnesses throughout much of the piece. However gender stereotypes and the idea of racial treachery figure significantly, in language evocative of Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* or Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (as they pertain to inter-racial sexual relations), with Eléna accusing D’Chimbo of betraying his race by victimizing only black women, and, as just cited, D’Chimbo accusing Eléna and those like her of duplicity in desiring white men in an attempt to transcend racial, social, and economic barriers. And yet nothing is resolved as the scene fades and the two leading characters remain at ideological odds, and the Sixth Tableau of the piece opens upon yet another flashback, but this time centering upon the memories of Eléna.

The setting of the new Tableau takes place within the confines of a “[salon] de bourgeois créole de Cayenne (p. 93),” with characters identified only as *Homme 1*, *Homme 2*, *Femme 1*, *Femme 2* at the opening. The scene finds them discussing the apparent hot topic of the day, the malevolent deeds of a fugitive known as D’Chimbo. It quickly becomes apparent to the audience that the scene serves as a forum to depict the conflicted loyalties amongst the Creole bourgeoisie as each of the characters appears to embody varying ideological positions vis-à-vis the domestic “terror” under which the colony currently finds itself. Representing one extreme viewpoint, as a colonized individual who accepts the status quo and has been so infused with colonial ideology that she echoes the attitudes of the colonizer, *Femme 2*, in language evocative of Bouyer’s *Notes*, states “Vous parlez de D’Chimbo ? Cet homme est une bête. Un véritable animal d’Afrique. Car il est impossible qu’un être humain comme nous puisse accomplir tous

ces crimes abominables (p. 93).” However, this point of view is countered by *Homme 2*, who, while asserting that his aim is not to defend the actions of the alleged criminal, questions the authenticity of the prevailing gossip, culminating in the justification of his suspiciousness by maintaining, “Avouez qu’il est tout de même bizarre qu’on puisse accuser D’Chimbo d’avoir au même instant commis deux méfaits en des lieux aussi éloignés que Lamirande et Montabo (p. 95).” Thus, *Homme 2*’s argument serves not only as a counterpoint to *Femme 2*’s unquestioning acceptance of the “official” interpretation of events within the narrative, but also as a point of interrogation as to the historicity of the D’Chimbo Affair itself.

The investigation of historical authenticity is continued in the Seventh and final Tableau of *La nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo* as Eléna, attempting to provoke D’Chimbo into confessing and thus facing his own culpability for his fugitive criminality, confronts him by forcing him to admit or deny several felonious and immoral deeds he has allegedly committed. To some of the allegations, D’Chimbo concedes liability, others he persistently refutes, and the historicity of the D’Chimbo Affair of 1860-1861 in French Guiana is again called into question as he protests “Mais dans tout ce que tu racontes là, il y a beaucoup de mensonges. Actuellement, moi, D’Chimbo, on me rend responsable de tout ce qui se passe à Cayenne (p. 100).” Racial stereotypes and fidelity to one’s race, nation, and culture once again all loom large in the discussion as the debate regarding victimization and criminal culpability continues. The narrative’s action concludes as Eléna, who here embodies the fictionalized thoughts, words, and actions of the historical Julienne, in an act paralleling that of the historical Julienne, manages to break free of D’Chimbo’s constraints and evade her prison as he lays sleeping. The fugitive awakes to find his prisoner missing, and sensing danger, soliloquizes, “...il faut que je parte, que j’aille me cacher avant qu’elle amène des gendarmes ici (p. 104).” We thus pass to the final

scene to find D'Chimbo on the scaffold, consistent with the historical record. However, in a final address to the crowd which has turned out to see him die, much of the play's general theme is summarized:

D'CHIMBO (*REGARDANT LA FOULE*)

Alors, vous êtes tous venus me voir mourir. Vous êtes venus voir D'Chimbo. Vous êtes contents, vous êtes venus voir les Blancs couper la tête d'un Nègre. C'est vrai, j'ai fait beaucoup de mal ici, mais vous m'avez fait davantage mal. Vous savez, si les Blancs n'avaient pas amené nos ancêtres ici, si les Blancs ne m'avaient pas fait quitter mon village ROUNGOUN, si nous-mêmes Nègres nous ne laissions pas les Blancs nous mener comme des enfants, peut-être tout ceci ne serait pas arrivé, peut-être je ne serais pas aujourd'hui D'Chimbo, le criminel (p. 105).

Defiant to the end, D'Chimbo goes to his death believing that external factors have played a large role in causing him to become the outlaw now displayed before the crowd, and whose execution, absurdly and grotesquely, would perpetuate an even greater injustice than the acts for which he has been condemned – a corrupt political, cultural and social infrastructure founded upon an insidious ideology encapsulated in the words of Albert Memmi: “Racism sums up and symbolizes the fundamental relation which unites colonialist and colonized (*The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 70).”

Above all else, Stéphenson's play functions as an interrogation of racism as the root cause of evil, specifically as it pertains to the colonial infrastructure and discourse in both the past as well as the present.

It can easily be argued that one of the fundamental motivations behind D'Chimbo's criminal behavior in *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* manifests itself through his underlying



hate of assimilation. As his own attempt to integrate himself into the colonial society of the Guyane colony ultimately ends in failure and his alienation from his friends, co-workers, and fellow Africans, it is not surprising that an adverse reaction to cultural and social estrangement should result in a deep-seated distrust of those who have found a degree of prosperity in acculturating themselves to that society which has rejected him. D'Chimbo's disenfranchisement almost seems to be directly taken from the pages of Albert Memmi's 'Portrait of the Colonized.' As Memmi asserts,

As long as he tolerates colonization, the only possible alternatives for the colonized are assimilation or petrification. Assimilation being refused him...nothing is left for him but to live isolated from his age. He is driven back by colonization and, to a certain extent, lives with that situation. Planning and building his future are forbidden. He must therefore limit himself to the present, and even that present is cut off and abstract (p. 102).

Having not only lost his only means of financial support, i.e. means of survival, but also having been driven into hiding to avoid persecution by the colonial powers, D'Chimbo finds himself faced with the petrification described by Memmi. To D'Chimbo's way of thinking, and indeed to that of many others who find themselves in similar circumstances, he has been deprived of literally everything he needs to exist. As all other means to fulfill his survival needs have been effectively extricated, his recourse to criminality to fulfill those needs takes on a particular, albeit ruinous, logic.

The pervasive extent of assimilationist discourse is highlighted perhaps no more prominently in the narrative than in Scene II of the Sixième Tableau. This scene finds two black servants, identified as *Domestique 1* and *Domestique 2* discussing details of the news of

D'Chimbo's reign of terror as apparently overheard in the Creole bourgeois household featured in the preceding scenes:

DOMESTIQUE 2

De quoi parlaient-ils ainsi ?

DOMESTIQUE 1

De D'Chimbo. C'est de lui qu'ils étaient en train de parler.

DOMESTIQUE 2

Quant à celui-là, son seul nom me donne la nausée. C'est un Nègre qui vient de l'enfer.

DOMESTIQUE 1

Tu peux le dire. S'il ne s'agissait que de moi, on le brûlerait vif.

DOMESTIQUE 2

C'est vrai ce qu'a dit la Bible. Le Nègre, c'est l'enfant de Cham. Tu sais, Cham s'était moqué de son père qui était saoul [sic]. Son père l'a tellement maudit qu'il en est devenu noir comme le lot-chò. C'est à cause de ça que nous sommes maudits. Tu as vu comme D'Chimbo est noir ! Plus un Nègre est noir, plus il est maudit (p. 97).

In *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory*, author Raymond F. Betts explains, "Assimilation can be considered the traditional colonial doctrine of France. Although variously interpreted, in essence it meant that the colony was to become an integral, if noncontiguous, part of the mother country, with its society and population made over – to whatever extent possible – in her image (p. 8)." In this manner, the two servants in this scene exemplify complete colonial assimilation to the extent that *Domestique 2* professes herself convinced of her own state of damnation. Furthermore, it can be argued that *Domestique 2*'s unperceived sense of self-

loathing, doubtlessly affected through her unquestioning acceptance of assimilationist discourse, has, by default, caused her to become a racist. Once again, the words of Albert Memmi seem to apply quite aptly to the case in point even if, in the particular instance analyzed here, the racism exhibited by the domestiques takes on more of an aspect of self-loathing than of anti-colonial discourse: “If Xenophobia and racism consist of accusing an entire human group as a whole, condemning each individual of that group, seeing in him an irremediably noxious nature, then the colonized has, indeed, become a racist (p. 130).”

That even a black servant, representative of one of the lowest rungs in colonial society, can express herself in undeniably racist terminology testifies to the ubiquity of racial prejudice and racial stereotypes that infest virtually every aspect of the colonial infrastructure as presented by the narrative of *La Nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo*. The notion carries itself to an even further extreme as the audience witnesses in D’Chimbo’s encounters with the two matados. In this this example, as well as with that of *Domestique 2* cited above, at issue is the degree of blackness of D’Chimbo’s skin. The 2ème matado repeatedly refers to his dark blackness, employing disparaging terms in a mocking fashion in so doing, and using his degree of blackness, above all else, as the primary reason for her assertion that no woman in the Guyane colony would ever have him.

Throughout the narrative of *La Nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo* racism and racial stereotypes haunt D’Chimbo at every turn. He is accused of theft because he is black. He is not to be trusted because he is black. He is feared because he is black. He is rejected because he is *too* black. And ultimately, argues the text, he is put to death because he is black. If it is true that one of the primary objectives of *La nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo* is to identify, or at least to explore, the root causes for the criminal behavior of D’Chimbo, and in so doing question the

historical authenticity of the legend's legacy as handed down by sources such as *Notes*, then at least one response to the question is as straightforward and candid as Stéphençon's narrative style: racism.

### ***Massak***

As Elie Stéphençon's *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* takes its inspiration from countering disparaging colonial legacies, in particular that of Frédéric Bouyer's *Notes*, so the inspiration for his second dramatic offering featuring the fabled D'Chimbo character, *Massak*, also derives from a previously published narrative, which is Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*. Unlike *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* however, which seeks to repudiate certain accepted historical norms in French Guiana, *Massak*, conversely, appears to aspire towards an augmentation or a continuance of themes, topics, interrogations, etc. introduced in Patient's novella. In this manner, we encounter a number of similar textual elements. In particular, we find a majority of the cast of characters drawn directly from *Le Nègre du gouverneur*. However, as Stéphençon states in his *Avertissement*, "... notre intention n'est pas de mettre en scène ou de donner une certaine interprétation du livre (p. 109)." But rather, as he states a bit further on, Patient's novella offers "a framework" upon which he hopes the audience will understand that his narrative, too, can explore, and perhaps compare, the two methods of resistance to colonial discourse which comprise the fundamental question addressed in *Massak* (p. 109). In this section, we shall explore these questions, as well as the correlative issues of assimilation and mimicry, as primary elements of a narrative that seeks to, once again, explore the racial, social, and cultural legacies that continue to confront the colonized peoples of French Guiana.

In terms of textual length, *Massak* represents a more complete narrative than *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo*, despite being divided into two fewer Tableaux. From a purely superficial point of view, the dialogue appears lengthier and more developed than that found in *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo*. However, it can indeed be argued that the second of Stéphenon's D'Chimbo-based theatrical dramas reflects a more carefully constructed narrative in that the storyline retains a certain continuity that is markedly absent in Stéphenon's first theatrical offering. That is not to say that the narrative of *Massak* does not at all possess certain deficiencies, requiring contextual familiarity with the realities of slavery in French Guiana's past, or conversancy with the Patient narrative in order to fill in the gaps that might hinder the reader or audience member less familiar with the background knowledge required to fully appreciate the message that the text aims to convey. However, this is somewhat understandable, for, as Florence Martin explains, Stéphenon's target audience is undeniably specific in focus: "...le théâtre de Stéphenon se veut d'abord une *performance*, destinée avant tout au public guyanais. Même si aujourd'hui ces pièces ne sont plus « vues », mais lues par des non-Guyanais... (*De la Guyane à la diaspora africaine*, p. 99)." As discussed in the previous chapter, a re-writing of the D'Chimbo legend, whether or not the audience (i.e. the reader) agrees with the argument, opens itself up to accusations of distorting history. In this sense, one could argue that displacing the D'Chimbo narrative along temporal, historiographical, and thematic lines limits the effectiveness of the message to the intended audience. In other words, Stéphenon's *Massak*, as with Patient's novella, could be construed as devaluing its potential effectiveness the further it pulls away from accepted norms surrounding the myth. However, while the narrative framework of *Massak* differs from that of *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, most noticeably in that the former comes to us in the form of a play while the latter is presented as a novella, the two works share an important

attribute in that the implied author/narrator and the narratee relationship remains largely intact. Thus we may make a similar observation in that as individual members of what we term here as the “target audience” can find elements with which to personally identify, those who remain outside the parameters of the target audience can find thematic characteristics with which to empathize, and perhaps learn something about political, social, and cultural perceptions and observations from a land and a people whose voices have remained hidden or repressed for much of their collective existence. To put it another way, can Stéphenon’s play be considered too esoteric, especially in light of Martin’s observation that his intended audiences are specifically French Guianese? Perhaps on some levels. Outside audiences can easily miss many cultural frames of reference in that they have little or no knowledge of the French Guianese experience. But on the other hand, there is much also that can be taken away by audiences from outside the département in that certain universalities are also explored, with particular regard to regional similarities and also with regard to the human condition in the general sense of the term. By way of example, who among us has not at one time or another either suffered at the hands of, or at least felt uncomfortable with, the process of conforming to social norms? So while certain elements of the narrative can indeed only appeal specifically to the “target audience,” they are not necessarily exclusive of those outside said audience. Comparatively speaking, however, it can be argued that *Massak* appears to leave the non-Guianese reader with less room for potential ambiguity than does *La nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo*.

*Massak* opens with a “voix off” presenting a brief history of Napoleon’s re-institution of slavery, “à l’instigation de l’Impératrice Joséphine, fille de riches planteurs blancs de la Martinique” and the resulting maroon rebellion that plagued the historical governor mandated with re-introducing slavery to the colony, Victor Hugues (p. 110). The brief synopsis of the

events central to the setting of the drama is concluded with an introduction to the the maroon leaders Simon, Adome, and Adome's lieutenants, Pompée, and Jérôme who figure largely in the narrative which follows. This prologue to the narrative is not without political and social commentary, however. Referring to the return to slavery in the face of the French Revolutionary ideals of *liberté, égalité*, and *fraternité*, the *Voix Off* asserts "L'acte le plus noble de la Révolution française de 1789 venait d'être réduit à rien. La France, championne de la liberté, régressant dans l'obscurantisme (p. 110)." Thus, the audience is presented, in the space of two short phrases, with an ideological conflict that will play a key role in the unfolding of the plot which follows.

The four theatrical scenes which comprise the Premier Tableau feature primarily the chief maroons, Adome, Pompée, Jérôme, and the wise old warrior, Dinga, interchangeably discussing tactics and strategies in the ongoing fight against colonial oppression and slavery. Scene I paints an alternatively bleak and encouraging picture as Pompée and Dinga deliberate upon the whereabouts of Jérôme, whose return to camp is overdue. The scene functions as a continuation of the *Voix Off*'s background setting for the narrative as an anxious Pompée asserts "Les combats deviennent de plus en plus difficiles. Nous nous battons beaucoup, mais on dirait que les Blancs avancent sans cesse sur nous (p. 112)." But a more optimistic Dinga counterbalances Pompée's apprehensive concerns with his observation, "Pourtant, la rébellion est partout, chaque jour des esclaves s'enfuient des plantations, des actes de marronages, de brigandages sont signalés partout. Hier encore, à deux pas de Vidal un Blanc a été tué (pp. 112-113)." Thus, historical context is reiterated, and the audience is introduced to the idea that colonial domination is seen as a pervasive evil if such a noticeable percentage of slaves are willing to risk their lives to throw off their shackles through liberating acts of potentially violent defiance, while

at the same time the relentless persecution of the rebels and the conflict itself on the part of the white dominating class emphasizes not only the extremes to which the white man will resort in an effort to maintain the reins of power, but also the privileged economic resources and manpower available which enables such a unremitting prosecution of the conflict.

The mood darkens as in Scene II, the return of Jérôme brings with it the news that the French forces have succeeded in recruiting a number of colonized subjects to fight for their cause, and that as a result, the military advance upon the resisting maroons looms ominously for the resistance movement:

“Les troupes françaises avancent assez rapidement. Ils ont engagé des Mulâtres et quelques Noirs-libres. Ceux-là connaissent bien la forêt et savent également se battre. Il y a aussi beaucoup de soldats qui sont arrivés (p. 113).” This turn of events in the narrative serves not only the practical purpose of highlighting the danger in which the rebels find themselves and the bleak strategic outlook in the struggle against the oppressive forces, but also initiates the play’s first critical look at racial treachery, as it is revealed that the camp of a fourth maroon leader, Simon, which had been considered to be very well hidden, has now been surrounded, intimating that only disloyalty could have brought about such an ominous change in fortune. The idea reveals itself as explicit in the words of Pompée, who finds the idea of treason not only revolting, but, for reasons he dare not even attempt to comprehend, murderous to one’s own interests:

...Trahison ! Trahison ! Trahison, toujours et encore ! Nos défaites finalement sont toujours causées par les nôtres, nos propres frères. Quand donc le Nègre comprendra-t-il que l’intérêt de la race passe avant tout. Quand donc l’esclave comprendra-t-il que le chemin de la Liberté passe par celui du sacrifice ! (p. 114)



Pompée's words contain little or no room for interpretation as the audience experiences yet another example of the explicit and discursive style of the playwright which manifests itself frequently in *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* as well as throughout *Massak*.

The final two scenes of the Premier Tableau continue in much the same vein as Scenes I and II, painting a narrative portrait of the maroon leaders and resistance movement as the chiefs discuss offensive and defensive manoeuvres aimed at survival and resistance in their never-ending struggle against colonialism. In the final scene of the Tableau, we learn of the death of Adome, which leaves Pompée in charge of the encampment and this particular cell of the maroon resistance.

The Deuxième Tableau of *Massak*, the lengthiest of either of Stéphenon's D'Chimbo-based theatrical offerings, introduces the audience to the characters of Victor Hugues and Kalimbo, an obvious and unconcealed metamorphosis of the name D'Chimbo. Of the characters presented in the Tableau, only Victor Hugues retains a name consistent with his corresponding character in Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*. In addition to the metamorphosed appellation of Kalimbo, we discover that Patient's Lady Stanley has become Stéphenon's Lady Moore, the Barel family has become the family Morel, and as we learn later in the fourth Tableau, Patient's Vilouin is now Stéphenon's Vilar. The reasons for the name changes are not altogether cryptic, for, as we have seen in Stéphenon's *Avertissement*, the playwright has alluded to the fact that he wishes for his play, while inspired by and respectfully cognizant of the creativity of Patient's novella, to remain a separate literary offering. By changing the names of the fictional, or fictionalized characters that surface in both works, Stéphenon has managed to pay all due respect to Patient's narrative, while at the same time making the characters his own, so to speak. Thus, the endeavor to allow Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur* to remain uncontaminated by his

own narrative and the interpretations offered therein, accomplishes the goal of distancing the two narratives while simultaneously rendering literary homage.

Nevertheless, the personality traits which personify several of the characters in *Le Nègre du gouverneur* remain more or less consistent, with the exception of Lady Moore, in their reincarnation in the theatrical *Massak*. Victor Hugues is once again personified as an iron-fisted colonial tyrant with an acerbic temperament in the classic mold of Memmi's portrait of the colonizer, and as does the Hugues of Patient's Novella, treats his fellow colonialists with a familiar disregard and disrespect, and in so doing, once again exhibits the traits of an individual possessive of a god-complex. Hugues' irritable, unfriendly, and frustrated attitudes towards his subordinates manifest themselves immediately upon the introduction to his character in *Massak*'s Deuxième Tableau, as the opening lines attest:

V. HUGUES (*IRRITÉ*)

Mais vous ne m'apprenez rien ! Rien de bon, capitaine. D'ailleurs, je me demande même pourquoi vous êtes ici.

LE CAPITAINE

Pour faire mon rapport, Monsieur le Gouverneur.

V. HUGUES

Venir me faire part régulièrement de vos échecs, c'est cela que vous appelez présenter votre rapport ! Vous vous moquez, Capitaine ! (p. 123)

Hugues' vitriolic nature is tempered somewhat, however, a bit further on in Scene I as he expresses admiration for Pompée's military and political prowess: "Pour un Nègre, ce Pompée est absolument remarquable. A dire vrai, il se comporte comme un véritable stratège militaire et politique (p. 124)." Hugues' admiration of Pompée's strategic genius appears curiously logical,

from a narrative stance at any rate, for without his ability to recognize a black man or a slave's intellectual capacity and dexterity, the storyline of *Massak* could hardly exist. But this brief break in character quickly fades as he immediately signals to his capitaine that there is no other option than for Pompée to die by the governor's doing, which carries over the inherently violent and murderous tendencies of the governor first encountered so explicitly and profusely in Patient's portrayal.

Scenes III and IV feature a visit to the governor by Lady Moore. From the viewpoint of narrative strategy, her presence appears somewhat peripheral, if not superfluous, as the visit accomplishes little, other than to serve as a means of reflecting Hugues' own opinions regarding Kalimbo, to provide a bit more continuity between this narrative and that of Patient, and to perhaps reiterate the silly girlish-ness of the feminine component of the colonial elite through her supplication to the governor to host a ball in her honor; a request to which Hugues scoffs and which he mocks in the briefest of all the drama's scenes, after she has departed from the action of Scenes II and III, and from the play altogether, it is worth noting. Absent is the sexual tension between Lady Moore and Kalimbo that figures so prominently in Patient's narrative, and which is highlighted by her inability to immediately recognize her former slave, as well as by her almost flippant reference to him in her two scenes at the governor's palace. Thus, Lady Moore's presence in and utility to the narrative as a sounding board for Hugues' commentary regarding the object at the center of his military project might just as easily have been accomplished through the presence of another character, and therefore perhaps, represents a weak point in, or rather an underdeveloped aspect of the overall narrative structure. By virtue of the very absence of the sexual tension between Lady Moore and Kalimbo, there perhaps exists an additional subtextual commentary upon the idea of race-mixing from the viewpoint of the playwright. In

*Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon, speaking to the psychopathological effects of colonial discourse on the black man, argues, “I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*...Now – and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged – who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man...I am a white man (p. 63).” Thus perhaps, the absence noted here functions not only as a point of differentiation from Patient’s text, but also as a refusal on the part of the colonized black man of his need for recognition as a white man through the love of a white woman.

The governor’s orders for Kalimbo to embark upon a mission to offer Pompée and his band of maroons amnesty in exchange for peace, and the subsequent and notorious farewell passage first encountered in *Le Nègre du gouverneur* comprise the final two scenes of the Deuxième Tableau. This portion of Stéphenon’s drama, perhaps more so than any other, most closely follows the storyline of Patient’s narrative. Much of the dialogue and terminology employed by the playwright corresponds to that of the original, although minor variations differentiate the two texts, and Stéphenon’s version appears as an abbreviated or abridged account of the corresponding passages found in *Le Nègre du gouverneur*.

The Troisième Tableau of *Massak* represents the most crucial of the five in that within the six scenes which comprise the tableau, the two arguments centering upon which strategy embodies the most effective means of resistance to colonial domination and oppression, as presented by Stéphenon in his *Avertissement*, are laid bare and put to debate. At this point, it is perhaps prudent to revisit Stéphenon’s own words on the subject, as they shall figure largely in our discussion and analysis of *Massak* from this point forward.

Notre point de départ et notre objectif sont d’ordre théorique, dans la mesure où nous croyons que le problème essentiel qui se pose aux Guyanais (et à la Guyane) est de

nature stratégique et méthodologique. A ce niveau deux thèses, à notre avis, s'affrontent. L'une qui défend la possibilité d'un certain dialogue peut se caractériser par l'idée de compromission, on pourrait aussi l'appeler la stratégie de l'anguille. L'autre se veut plus intransigeante voire radicale et semble exclure la négociation en tant que telle. Entre les deux une série de nuances, mais en réalité aucune troisième voie originale. D'ailleurs où pourrait-elle se situer ? Sur quelle ligne de partage ? (p. 108)

In essence, the two methods of colonial resistance here proposed by Stéphenon are *assimilation* in an attempt to force the colonizer to recognize the colonized as his equal, and *revolt* which often entails violent and other unsavory methods of opposition. In Part Two of Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, the same argument is proposed. As the author states, "The two historical possible solutions are then tried in succession or simultaneously. He attempts either to become different or to reconquer all the dimensions which colonization tore away from him (p. 120)." Addressing the rather thin line between cultural resistance and self-stereotyping, Ania Loomba argues, "[in] practice, it has not been easy for critics to maintain a balance between 'positioning' the subject and amplifying her/his voice. Several attempts to write 'histories from below' have come close to essentialising the figure or the community of the resistant subaltern (p. 241)." This idea is evident in Stéphenon's D'Chimbo plays by virtue of the either/or (i.e. Manichean) nature of the white vs. black struggle at center as well as in the options proposed as a means of resistance, and in this manner, opens the dramas up to criticism as simply a universalizing cultural volte-face.

Hence in Stéphenon's *Massak*, Kalimbo represents the assimilationist method of resistance, while Pompée and his fellow maroons represent the method of revolt. In Scene III of

the Troisième Tableau, Kalimbo proffers his primary argument, which primarily consists of using the master's tools against him:

Et c'est là ma force, je prends la langue du Blanc, je vole sa culture, je vole ses connaissances et je deviens aussi capable que lui. Il m'apprend, il m'apprend des choses, le Blanc, il m'apprend ses manières, ses méthodes et il s'amuse de mes imitations. Mais il ne sait pas qu'il me nourrit, qu'il me donne ses forces pour le vaincre (p. 138)."

Conversely, the expression of Pompée's core argument appears later in the Tableau, in Scene VI in response to Kalimbo's query as to whether or not he can accept an alternative means of resistance and whether or not a partial freedom is better than no freedom at all:

Assez, assez Kalimbo tu déraisonnes. La liberté partielle t'entraîne au désastre à la longue. Or, pourquoi ne sommes-nous pas les plus forts ? Parce que la société dans laquelle nous vivons quand nous sommes libres à moitié, est organisée, dirigée par le Blanc, je te l'ai déjà dit. Tu vois, une société, c'est comme un cheval, si tu ne tiens pas la bride, tu ne peux mener le cheval, même si tu es dans la charrette. Est-ce que tu comprends ?

Il faut aussi savoir Kalimbo, que les hommes combattent parce qu'ils ont faim et qu'ils sont esclaves. Mais si tu leur donnes un cui de couac, si tu leur donnes une chaîne souple... ils deviennent moins révoltés, moins combatifs. Le Blanc sait cela, voilà pourquoi il propose la liberté à moitié (p. 147).

The scene and the Tableau conclude shortly thereafter, with both men unable to convince the other to seriously consider the validity of each one's argument, and Kalimbo setting out to deliver the message of Pompée's refusal to accept the governor's proposal of amnesty.

The first scene of the Quatrième Table of Massak corresponds more or less to pages 23-25 of the 2001 Ibis Rouge edition of *Le Nègre du gouverneur* in which Viloun/Vilar reveals to the governor the shocking embrace shared by Kalimbo and the prosecutor's daughter as seen through his spyglass. As with the final two scenes of the Deuxième Tableau, the scene parallels the action and the vocabulary employed in Stéphenson's narrative is comparatively analogous with that found in Patient's novella. The subsequent scene features a verbal explosion by the governor in response to Vilouin's news similar to the one found in Patient's text, including a few corresponding terms, which can, if nothing else, be considered a literary nod to the play's inspiration. However, the correlative wording of Hugues' reaction diverges somewhat from that found in *Le Nègre du gouverneur* as here the verbal vitriol not only reinforces the explosive, venomous temperament of the governor, but is also directed toward Kalimbo in an even more intensely hateful and personalized manner, which consequently functions as an outlet for what we gather to be Hugues' true feelings vis-à-vis the black race, contrary to the admiration and respect superficially expressed earlier in the narrative.

Upon his return to the governor's palace in Scene III, Kalimbo's report is greeted by Hugues with an accusation of betrayal, for failing to successfully complete the mandated mission and for being unable to disclose the position of Pompée's camp due to its frequent strategic relocation, for which the governor places him under arrest, much to the protagonist's confusion. But it rapidly becomes clear to Kalimbo that his fall from the governor's graces is motivated by more than the feeble excuse of perceived military failure and insubordination:

#### V. HUGUES

Il n'y a rien à comprendre, tu m'as trahi, ingrat.

KALIMBO

Moi, vous trahir, Monsieur le Gouverneur !

V. HUGUES

Oui ! Et ton ignominie porte un nom : Virginie (p. 154).

The protagonist and antagonist subsequently square off in a verbal squabble in which racial and cultural stereotypes are flung about culminating in Kalimbo being led off to condemnation which epitomizes the inevitable fate of the impotent slave when confronted with the juggernaut that is colonial power and subjugation.

The concluding Tableau finds Kalimbo in a prison cell, awaiting the scaffold. The narrative at this point explicitly indicates that the protagonist has learned his lesson, as his soliloquy promises to “[prendre] le chemin des guerriers, le chemin des Nèg’marrons (p. 157).” But the Voix Off de Pompée tells him, as well as the audience, that the learned lesson has arrived too late, that he is condemned to death, that the method of resistance that he has embodied inevitably leads to doom, that his “bons sentiments n’abattront aucun ennemi et ne relèveront pas les frères qui sont tombés (p. 157).” And in its continuing chastisement of Kalimbo, the Voix Off contains a warning for the audience: “Et il y aura encore des hommes comme toi qui penseront que la combinaison, la compromission, valent mieux qu’un combat exemplaire (p. 157).” Following a brief exchange between Kalimbo and the Voix Off regarding the importance of the collective memory of a people, the curtain closes as Kalimbo offers another promise, this one relating directly to the idea and of the necessity of collective memory: “Ils sauront, Pompée. Ils sauront et ils COMBATTRONT (p. 158)”

At this point it should be obvious that the process of cultural assimilation figures quite largely in both of Stephenson’s theatrical dramas. While it might be argued that cultural



assimilation in *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* takes a back seat to the more prevalent theme of racism, there can be little mistaking that the process of cultural assimilation is featured to a much greater extent in *Massak*, and indeed, as we have seen, Stéphenson himself attests to this assertion in his *Avertissement*. As in Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, the process of cultural assimilation manifests itself as a primary motivation for Kalimbo as he attempts to transcend fixed racial, cultural, and social stereotypes and limitations predicated on colonial discourse. While it may succeed, to a greater or lesser extent with Patient's D'Chimbo, as his fate is left undecided at the end of the narrative, the consequences of Stéphenson's Kalimbo choosing the path of assimilation as a passive means of resistance, as has been shown above, are far grimmer. While Kalimbo represents the sole featured character that personifies acceptance of the process in *Massak*, other instances surface as noticeable textual elements. Pompée, upon learning of Simon's predicament caused by those whom he considers to be traitors, appears incredulous at the thought of treason as a means of vengeance. Although partially cited earlier as an example, it is here worth repeating, as in this instance, it pertains to the idea of cultural assimilation:

JEROME

Simon est un chef remarquable, tu sais. Mais également impitoyable. Il a fait couper la tête à un homme qui s'était laissé surprendre par le sommeil lors de sa garde. Le frère, pour se venger, a vendu Simon aux Blancs.

POMPÉE

C'est fort possible. Trahison ! Trahison ! Trahison, toujours et encore ! Nos défaites finalement sont toujours causées par les nôtres, nos propres frères. Quand donc le Nègre comprendra-t-il que l'intérêt de la race passe avant tout. Quand donc l'esclave comprendra-t-il que le chemin de la Liberté passe par celui du sacrifice !

## JEROME

Pour toi, pour moi, pour certains d'entre nous, cela paraît simple, évident. Mais pour la majorité, il n'en est pas de même. N'oublie pas que le Blanc fait de l'esclave une véritable bête... et une bête ça ne pense à rien, à rien. Ça suit son instinct. Il faut leur laisser le temps (p. 114).

Here, Jerome suggests that assimilative complacency cannot be universally considered a consequence of choice. Instead, as is often the case with other potential tools of usurpation, knowledge is kept out of the hands of the colonial oppressed. Therefore, some potential allies in the struggle have not yet attained the conscious awakening pivotal to an active means of resistance. In this sense, Kalimbo represents just such an individual, however, as we have seen, his tardive *prise de conscience* is not enough to save him from doom, and hence the warning advanced by the *Voix Off*.

If the concept of cultural assimilation figures significantly in *Massak*, the refusal to assimilate, and thus accept the subjugated status quo of colonial norms looms as least as largely, as evidenced by the apparent lesson imparted at the end of the drama. It is, of course, Pompée who most clearly personifies the only alternative to assimilation. We have seen cited above this character's argument against the strategy of assimilation as a tool of usurpation as ultimately ineffective, and in this case deadly, and as far as the narrative of *Massak* is concerned, he is proven correct. Additionally, however, Pompée augments his argument for active resistance through a commentary on the nature of liberty, such as he perceives it to exist, should it be achieved through the method of cultural assimilation. Responding to Kalimbo's assertion that he desires liberty for himself and for the men of his race, Pompée asserts, "Je te crois, mais quand nous arriverons à la liberté par le chemin que tu conseilles, comment serons-nous ? Nos

cerveaux seront remplis des idées des Blancs. Nous verrons le monde comme les Blancs. Forcément notre liberté sera celle des Blancs (p. 139).” Such a liberty, he implies, is no real liberty at all. Implied is the idea that such a stagnant liberty can only lead to a slow loss of one’s identity, and hence, one’s soul.

Associated with the concept of cultural assimilation is that of mimicry. As mimicry figures perceptibly in *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, so it does in *Massak*. Absent however, is D’Chimbo/Kalimbo’s development of mimicry used explicitly in Patient’s novella as another tool designed to usurp the master. As that aspect of mimicry was explored in the previous chapter featuring the presentation and analysis of *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, it might here be redundant to repeat the same concepts and assertions due primarily to the fact that so much of Stéphenon’s storyline, that aspect included and in particular, parallels that of Patient’s narrative. For, in *Massak*, our first encounter with Kalimbo has him already assimilated to the point where his mimicry primarily functions in making him the target of ridicule for Pompée and his men. An explicit example of this can be found in the third scene of the third tableau, in which Kalimbo, attempting to sway Pompée to his way of thinking, asserts that he is familiar enough with the white man be able to resist, at least ideologically, that which is used to keep the slave subjugated. To which Pompée responds ironically, “Oh oui ! je sais que tu connais les Blancs, la preuve, tu les imites à la perfection (p. 137).” Thus, Pompée implies that Kalimbo, through his mimicry of the white man, as it directly relates to his acceptance of the cultural assimilation, has, along the way, voided his African identity, and become partially white, despite Kalimbo’s protest to the contrary.

Summary

In this chapter, I have examined the two theatrical pieces of Elie Stéphenson featuring the D'Chimbo character which, like Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur* seeks to rehabilitate the historical and cultural legacies left to posterity, specifically by Frédéric Bouyer's *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d'un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863*. As we have seen, *La Nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* confronts directly the historical authenticity of Bouyer's text, as the primary motivations for D'Chimbo's criminality are explored and found to be, contrary to Bouyer's assertions, mitigated by other factors than mere innate racial proclivities. While Stéphenson's drama does not offer absolution for D'Chimbo's acts and behavior, it does demonstrate that a force as powerfully coercive as colonial discourse can indeed play a mitigating role in the motivations and thoughts of individuals caught up in the colonial system.

*Massak*, in a literary nod to Serge Patient's *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, offers the audience an interrogation of two methods of resistance, the *only* two possible methods according to both Stéphenson and Albert Memmi. The conclusion offered by the playwright is made explicit as Kalimbo, choosing the path of assimilation, pays for his choice with his life.

In conclusion, *La Nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo* and *Massak* serve as examples of a French Guianese playwright's efforts to reexamine historical and cultural norms that have been legated to his fellow citizens by a socio-political power structure that has, until recently, interpreted and relegated those historical and cultural norms in a manner doubtlessly designed to maintain that self-same power structure. In so doing, similar to Serge Patient's narrative, Elie Stéphenson offers an authentication of the history and culture of French Guiana that has been absent for too long. Additionally, Stéphenson's *Nouvelle légende* serves as a reminder to its audience of French Guiana's continued political status as a dependency of a dominating

European (colonial) power. And, by virtue of the message contained therein, speaks to Stéphenson's own sensitivity to his status as an "assimilated" Frenchman.

## Conclusion

In the preceding chapters of the present study, an attempt has been made to begin filling the noticeable critical and academic void of analysis of French Guianese literature as highlighted by Martin and Favre in the introduction to *De la Guayne à la diaspora africaine* (p. 10) and which was discussed earlier in the introduction my study , while at the same time, addressing to what extent the four primary texts presented and analyzed have influenced, do now influence, or may someday influence the historical, social, cultural, and more specifically literary legacy of the peoples of French Guiana. In terms of addressing the present status of literary production in French Guiana itself, the Ndaganos, editors of one of the few existing Guyanais literary anthologies, drive the point home:

Signalons d'abord l'absence de structures propres à la production du livre en Guyane. Il n'existe pratiquement pas, ou plus, de maison d'édition, si l'on ne prend pas en compte l'édition pédagogique, notamment avec le C.D.D.P. Par conséquent, en général, la plupart des écrivains sont livrés à eux-mêmes. Dans l'ensemble, ils abandonnent souvent la plume sans laisser de trace, sinon des brouillons qui dorment dans les tiroirs. Ceux qui, néanmoins, se sentent une âme d'écrivain, arrivent à publier à « compte d'auteur ». Dans ces conditions, la diffusion qui ne dépasse que rarement l'Ile de Cayenne – environ 15 km<sup>2</sup> – se fait sur le mode du porte-à-porte ou en dépôt-vente. La qualité du texte est parfois douteuse, le tirage toujours limité à une centaine d'exemplaires. Aucune critique (au sens de « réception » par un public n'accompagne la « sortie » du livre, qui disparaît comme il est venu, dans l'indifférence générale (p. 16).

As has hopefully been made clear, the apathy of the Guyanais public toward the D'Chimbo narratives of Serge Patient and Elie Stéphenson is exemplified by an insufficiency of critical reception amongst Guyanais scholars, as well as little or even nonexistent demand for public consumption (in the particular case of Stéphenson's plays [J.-M. Ndagano, p. 9]), but, as Martin and Favre have argued (p.10), this lack of interest extends beyond the borders of French Guiana itself. Worldwide, a minimum of critical analysis has been afforded the narratives, and the researcher is hard-pressed to find materials directly addressing them. To date, only Florence Martin and Isabelle Favre have devoted any serious amount of analysis of the narratives in question in their study *De la Guyane à la diaspora africaine*. Otherwise, one must consult the rather limited material in the only other works to even cite *Le Nègre du gouverneur*, *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo*, and *Massak: the Ndaganos* in the *Introduction à la littérature guyanaise*, Mam Lam Fouck in *D'Chimbo: du criminel au héros*, and the "critical" introductions to the latest publications of each work offered by the Ibis Rouge Publishing House. All arguments as to the artistic quality of these D'Chimbo narratives aside, it is either peculiar or telling that so little treatment has been offered as, according to both Mam Lam Fouck and Florence Martin, the legend of D'Chimbo constitutes a significant component of the folkloric conscience of French Guiana. The study just presented, therefore, perhaps represents the first and even most extensive analysis of Patient's and Stéphenson's D'Chimbo narratives to date. However, one must recognize the educational and intellectual limitations of the country. With sizable segments of the population living a virtual hand-to-mouth existence, academic readership and scholarship must itself be minimal by virtue of not only the lack or insufficiency of academic resources, but also the mere need survive in a harsh, and still largely un-modernized, environment. Particularly revealing in this regard are figures published recently by L'Institut national de la statistique et

des études économiques (L'INSEE) which show that “Les niveaux de formation des Guyanais progressent peu. En 2006, ils sont 53%, dans la population de 15 ans ou plus non-scolarisée, à n’avoir pas décroché le certificat d’études primaires (*Panorama des régions françaises* p. 183).” This perhaps helps to explain, in part, the rarity of scholarly interest within the département itself, but conversely, does little to clarify the intellectual disinterest on a more global scale, which in turn points to a continued marginalization of French Guiana on academic and other levels.

A similar lack of critical analysis of Bouyer’s *Notes* is also apparent. As demonstrated earlier, one can indeed find references to Bouyer’s travel chronicle, but more often than not, such mention appears in abbreviated form, frequently attributing a single, passing line, in reference to a geographical or natural scientific observation made by the French naval captain nearly a century and a half past. Only Mam Lam Fouck’s *D’Chimbo: du criminel au héros* and Martin and Favre’s study provide what might be considered as a noticeable, albeit in both instances also limited, volume of critical literary attention to the text. As with the D’Chimbo narratives of Serge Patient and Elie Stéphenson, the analysis presented in this study perhaps constitutes a first. That such treatment is offered nearly 150 years after the publication of Bouyer’s *Notes*, nearly 40 years after the first publication of Patient’s novella, and 25 years after the first appearance of *La Nouvelle légende de D’Chimbo*, and 23 years after *Massak* attests to the lack of interest, the critical void, depicted by Martin and Favre.

The study presented above has shown Frédéric Bouyer’s *La Guyane française: notes et souvenirs d’un voyage exécuté en 1862-1863* to be the manifestation of a classically colonial text of the 19th century, loyal to its discourse and ideology, and complete with ample instances of racist terminology and ideology inherent to the colonial mission in French Guiana. As a



consequence, texts such as Bouyer's have left an unflattering and yet indelible mark upon its history and culture. Despite its lack of attention in the academic sense, Bouyer's text itself exists as an almost canonical work on the peoples, history, and culture of French Guiana, as there are indeed few others with which to compare in its scope. As Chapters 3 and 4 have shown, Patient's and Stéphenon's reimagining of a particular episode from the history and cultural folklore of French Guiana aim to combat, or resist, colonial interpretations of the history and culture of their homeland. By drawing attention to the socially unjust, racist, violent, and psychologically damaging elements of colonial discourse and institutions, both writers, in styles reminiscent of Damas's poetry, attempt to awaken an otherwise indifferent population to the futility and dangers of the process of cultural assimilation and acceptance of cultural and historical norms as legated by texts such as that of Bouyer's *Notes*. Targeted at the colonized peoples of French Guiana, and, specifically, the descendants of the colony's slaves of yesteryear, Patient and Stéphenon's writings seek to shake the apathetic from their complacency, and as in case of Stéphenon in particular, heed the call for more active forms of resistance.

So, to what extent can we consider the two French Guianese writers' literary objectives to be "successful?" In terms of heeding the warning call, the continuing lack of interest in Patient's and Stéphenon's D'Chimbo narratives amongst educated readers and audiences within the populace of French Guiana point to evidence of a pervasive state of critical, political and cultural disinterest and/or acceptance of the vestiges of colonial norms and realities. Although the type of resistance called for in the D'Chimbo narratives remains apparently unheeded or minimal, at least on academic and cultural levels, other, yet similar forms of resistance may be operating at levels less conspicuous to observers beyond the borders of French Guiana nonetheless. An examination of such phenomena presents itself as an intriguing possibility for future study.

Artwork, such as paintings, statuary, and even graffiti, as well as music, in particular, present perhaps the most fertile possibilities in this pursuit.

With regard to the question of Patient's and Stéphenson's participation and inclusion in any existent or nascent French Guianese national literature, the answer presents itself in a more encouraging manner. Citing R. Chemain and A. Chemain-Degrangé's criteria in defining a national literature, the Ndaganos list such criteria as 1) having a significant number of writers and published works; 2) an historical connection to the nation's past; 3) the vitality of the author's work, and 4) the ability of the author's work to transcend national limits. Along these lines, we see that the first criterion is beyond the control of the writer. However, one can indeed argue that writings of both Patient and Stéphenson presented in this study maintain a discernible connection to the nation's past, and although in a very limited scope, the writings in question do transcend national limits in the sense that they are available in libraries beyond the borders of French Guiana and have now been examined by at least two academic publications outside of the territory. The vitality of the author's work, on the other hand, presents itself as a bit more problematic, but with the passage of time, may become less so. Nevertheless, limiting ourselves to the defining criteria of a national literature as offered by the Ndaganos, it would be hard to argue against the inclusion of Patient and Stéphenson's D'Chimbo narratives as a component of French Guianese national literature.

As alluded to earlier, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon defines the three phases in the formation of a national literature (p. 222). Defining the parameters of the second phase, he argues,

In the second phase we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is....But since the native is not a part of his people, since he only has exterior relations

with his people, he is content to recall their life only. Past happenings of the byegone [sic] days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed estheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies (p. 222).

Explaining the third and final phase, Fanon continues,

Finally in the third phase, which is called the fighting phase, the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people. Instead of according the people's lethargy an honored place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, and a national literature (pp. 222-223).

According to Fanon's model, we see that Patient's and Stevenson's D'Chimbo narratives fall fairly neatly into the categories, although it can be argued that a certain amount of crossover occurs between the second and third phases with regard to the each of the narratives. *Le Nègre du gouverneur* appears to most closely follow the criteria for the second phase as the D'Chimbo legend can be "reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed estheticism (Fanon, p. 222)" as we see from Patient's use of the French language and a traditional literary style. Although not quite as vociferous in the attempt to awaken the apathy of the people as in Stéphenon's plays, Patient's novella does slip over into Fanon's third phase inasmuch as the inherent criticism of colonial ideologies does convey elements of resistance and rebellion. Stéphenon's D'Chimbo-based dramas, on the other hand, appear to fit more readily within the confines of Fanon's third phase as there is an unmistakably revolutionary color to his comprehensive message. Still, slippage also occurs back into the second step of the formation of a national literature as Stéphenon's narratives, like that of Patient, attempt a rehabilitation and reinterpretation of an "old legend."

Thus we see that the D'Chimbo narratives not only meet the criteria for inclusion within a corpus of national literature as summarized by the Ndaganos, but are inclusive of the Fanonian definition as well.

Finally, in response to the question as to whether or not the works in question can be considered part of a national literary allegory, or even the beginnings of a new such allegory, conclusions prove a bit less emphatically definitive than with their inclusion within a speculative corpus of national literature. In the introduction to this study, we saw that Ashcroft et al. define allegory, worth reciting briefly here, as “a ‘symbolic narrative’ in which the major features of the movement of the narrative are all held to refer symbolically to some action or situation (*Key Concepts*, p. 9), and that within a postcolonial context, allegory serves to upset conventional colonial histories (p. 9). Furthermore, they argue, “So much of the life of the colonized subject has been constructed by, that is metaphorically ‘written’ by, colonialism that allegory becomes a way in which such writing may be contested (p. 10). To what extent then, does Ashcroft et al.’s definition apply with regard to the D'Chimbo narratives of Patient and Stéphenson? Certainly, as we have seen, the narratives make an attempt to disrupt the “official” colonial history of French Guiana in their rehabilitation of the D'Chimbo figure, and thereby contesting history as written by colonizing power according to the considerations defined by Ashcroft et al. As illustrated earlier, Mam Lam Fouck and Martin and Favre have convincingly argued in favor of a discernible influence of the D'Chimbo narratives as part of the national folkloric legend. But this must be considered within a Western academic framework. As we have seen a bit earlier, a non-reading or even illiterate public represents a large, even a majority of the population of French Guiana. Furthermore, the lack of academic and other interest in the narratives, also made clear a bit earlier, points to an, at best, tepid reaction of the larger, general populace of the

département. And what of the effect of the narratives, and indeed the legend itself, amongst other ethnic groups not directly implicated either in the legend itself or in the narratives in question? Such are considerations that present more intriguing possibilities for future studies and observations. Nevertheless, with the limitations observed in mind, we can concede that there exists a certain amount of allegorization and myth-making in process, even if only nascent at present, that will doubtlessly continue to expand and evolve with the passage of time.

## Appendix A

The following “historic” description is reproduced from the website:

< <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/redris/HTML/personnages1.html> >

### D’CHIMBO dit « le Rongou » (1828 - 1862)

D’CHIMBO, Africain de la tribu des Rongous, né au GABON (Congo Français) vers 1828, débarqua à la GUYANE le 26 Septembre 1858, comme immigrant, sous le numéro 1144. Engagé à la Compagnie des Mines d’or de l’APPROUAGUE, condamné à trois mois de prison pour coups et blessures, vol et vagabondage, il s’échappa de la geôle de CAYENNE le 28 Janvier 1860 et tint pendant près d’un an et demi la brousse, dans l’Île de Cayenne, ne vivant que de rapines, dévalisant les habitants, assaillant à main armée les passants isolés, les femmes surtout, et commettant quantité de vols, de viols et d’assassinats. Petit mais trapu et prodigieusement musclé, les dents de devant limées en pointe, tatoué sur la poitrine, le ventre et le dos, couturé sur tout le corps de cicatrices de coups de sabre et de coups de feu, D’Chimbo joignait à une force herculéenne une agilité incroyable. Il carbetait dans les parties les plus impénétrables de la brousse, sous le vent des sentiers qu’il surveillait sans être vu, fonçait sur ses victimes avec une impétuosité sans nom et disparaissait dans le « niaman » avec une prestesse telle que toute poursuite était vaine. Armé seulement d’un mauvais sabre d’abatis, il se jouait des coups de fusil qu’on lui tirait et passait pour invulnérable.

Sa tête ayant été mise' à prix, D'Chimho [sic], après avoir échappé à toutes les battues ordonnées sur les intenses de la population terrorisée, finit par se faire prendre, le 6 Juin 1861, à deux heures du matin, sur l'habitation « La Folie » où il était venu chercher du feu. Il fut capturé après une lutte terrible, par les deux immigrants ANGUILAYE et TRANQUILLE, Rongous comme lui.

D'après la légende populaire, TRANQUILLE, ne réussit à le blesser d'un coup de fusil que grâce à un « piaye » : ayant fait bouillir ses balles avec des filaments de maripa. Ligotté [sic], ramené à Cayenne dès le lever du jour, réintégré à la geôle, D'Chimbo fit des aveux partiels au juge d'instruction, Monsieur Frédéric BESSE.

Il comparut le 19 Août 1861 devant la Cour d'Assises, présidée par Monsieur BAUDOIN, et fut condamné à mort le 22 Août. Son exécution eut lieu le 14 Janvier 1862 sur la place du marché, à Cayenne. En allant à l'échafaud, comme le Révérend Père GUYODO, Curé de Cayenne, l'exhortait à se repentir et lui dépeignait les félicités célestes, D'Chimbo répondit « Dabo, pis ça si bon, pou kiça to pa ra pran'mo plas » (D'abord, puisque c'est si bon, pourquoi ne prends-tu pas ma place ?)

Le Président du Comité de patronage

du Musée Local.

Emile MERWART.

*Reproduction du texte sous le portrait.*

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